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ABSTRACT

This report is based on an in-depth study of early education in five multicultural primary schools in England's West Midlands. The aim of the study was to identify developments and features of organization that facilitate communication between teachers and children and among the children themselves. Specifically examined were the abilities of 247 children entering primary school reception classes during 1982-83 as shown over time and in different settings. A total of 41 percent of participants were indigenous Whites, 34 percent were of Asian origin, 24 percent were of Afro-Caribbean origin, and the remaining 1 percent were of other backgrounds. Part I of the report describes the characteristics of the schools, classes, and children. Part II describes the language abilities of children in a variety of settings. In the discussion, attention is drawn to some children with communication problems and to the influence of the setting on their apparent competence. Evidence is also reported of young children's ability to sustain complex language in a variety of settings and, in some instances, in more than one language. Interview schedules for teachers of reception classes and for parents are appended. (RH)

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Early Education of Children with Communication Problems:

Particularly Those from Ethnic Minorities

A report of the findings of a research
funded by the
Department of Education and Science 1982-84

MARGARET M. CLARK
JENNIFER E. BARR
WENDY DEWHIRST

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PREFACE

The following chapters contain the report of an in-depth study of the early education of children from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds which was undertaken in the West Midlands areas of Birmingham and Sandwell. The research was funded by an initial grant of £25,231 from the Department of Education and Science during 1982-83, and a supplementary grant of £6,000 during 1983-84 which made possible some additional work related to the study as originally planned. 'Hidden' costs were borne by Wolverhampton Polytechnic by the agreement to second a member of staff for one year during 1982-83 to work full-time on the project and for additional support during the extension of the project: also by permitting the involvement of members of the audio-visual department in preparation of video materials related to the study.

The research was based in the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Birmingham and was directed by Professor Margaret M. Clark, then Head of the Department of Educational Psychology. Dr. Jennifer Barr was Research Fellow on the project during 1982-83, Miss Wendy Dewhirst, Senior Lecturer at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, worked full-time on the research during 1982-83 and undertook considerable additional work in 1983-84. There were three consultants to the research project, Dr. Marion Blank of Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York; Miss Meta Bogle of the University of the West Indies and Professor Edith King of the University of Denver, Colorado. Professor King's guidelines for analysis of classroom contexts proved valuable in the initial stages of the research. Dr. Blank's advice was sought throughout the two years of the project on the language assessment of the children on her test, the 'Preschool Language Assessment Instrument' and in connection with the analysis of language transcripts, and Miss Bogle assisted with the interpretation of the Creole features in the language of a number of the children. Mrs. Brenda Robson, who had been the principal research worker on a preschool project from which this current study developed, gave invaluable help in the early stages in the collection of language samples in natural settings. Mr. R. Little of Wolverhampton Polytechnic, in consultation with the research team, prepared the audio-visual materials which have been developed during the project.

A project of this magnitude could not have been possible with this level of funding had it not been for the assistance of many other people either for a nominal fee or on a voluntary basis. Mrs. Heleana Whittaker, who prepared the Punjabi version of PLAI and assessed most of the children on that version, was allocated time by Sandwell Authority to undertake this work assisted by Mrs. Gay Malhotra. The assessment of the language of over two hundred children in the project would not have been possible without the assistance of two Master's level students of the project director, nor would the collection of the preschool language transcripts have been possible without the assistance of other students on the same course on 'Psychology and the Education of the Young Child'. The repeat testing in English of the Punjabi-speaking children was possible only thanks to the help of Mrs. Charanjeet Garcha, an assessor on the Steering Committee who also assisted with some of the videotapes. The interviews of the reception class teachers by Miss Dewhirst were facilitated by Mrs. Eleanor Anderson, the other assessor, who 'covered' during the teachers' absence and who also gave advice on the analysis of some of the language transcripts. The group language discourse settings were devised by Mrs. Elizabeth Coates who also undertook that aspect of the study as part of a research project for a higher degree. We are indebted to Mrs. Myra Dean for the work she undertook as a part-time assistant on the project. The members of the team greatly appreciate all the support they received from Mrs. Daphne Fowler who as research secretary not only typed numerous drafts of the manuscript but supported us and facilitated the research in a wide variety of ways.

We would like to express our thanks also to the members of the Steering Committee for their interest and encouragement throughout and particularly to Mrs. Brenda Staniland H.M.I. and Dr. R. Hull of D.E.S. and to Mrs. Garcha and Mrs. Anderson. We acknowledge with gratitude the advice and help of all those who have commented on drafts of this report.

This research was in every sense a cooperative venture, not least between the research workers and the staffs of the schools and the administrators in the two local authorities whose support we gratefully acknowledge. We are indebted also to the parents who agreed to be interviewed for the insights they provided into their aims for their children and into their children's development. We hope that the findings of the study will prove of value to those teachers and children who have so cheerfully welcomed us over the past two years and also to many others concerned with early education. We wish to express our thanks to the editors of Educational Review for publishing this book and particularly to Barrie Wade, General Editor, for his support.

The views which are expressed here are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Department of Education and Science.

Margaret M. Clark
Faculty of Education
University of Birmingham.
September 1984.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The following chapters contain the report of a study of the early education of children with communication difficulties particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds which was undertaken in the West Midlands over the period May 1982 - August 1983. The research was initially funded and planned as a one year project for 1982-83 but an extension into 1983-84, although with limited funding, enabled some additional work to be undertaken. The focus of the research has been early education in multicultural primary schools. The aim of the study has been to identify promising developments and features of organisation which facilitate communication between teachers and children and between the children themselves. The children in the research were those entering the reception class in five primary schools with varied proportions of children from different ethnic backgrounds. In the following chapters attention will be drawn to some children with communication problems and to the influence of the setting on their apparent competence. Evidence will also be reported of young children found to be capable of sustaining complex language in a variety of settings, and in some instances in more than one language. There were children from each ethnic background found to have problems in communication as there were other children from each ethnic background with an impressive range of discourse skills even at this early age.

The current research is a development from an earlier study undertaken in the West Midlands by the project director. That study, which had as its focus Preschool Education and Children with Special Needs and which was also funded by D.E.S., took place in the period 1979-1981 (Clark, Robson and Browning 1982). The aim, in the period immediately after the publication of the Warnock Report Special Educational Needs (HMSO 1978), was to investigate the incidence of children in ordinary preschool units perceived as having special needs. A major aspect of the study involved observation of children perceived as having special educational needs and of control children not so perceived within preschool units. Language samples were also obtained during free play in the units for a small sample of children, by means of radio microphones, and these were analysed to provide guidelines for staff development. The main study involved 104 preschool units with 5,605 children in Birmingham and Coventry.

The definitions of special educational needs used in the research were in accord with the Warnock Report.

It was clear in the study referred to above that difficulty in communication of and with many of the children with special needs was seen as a major problem by the staffs in the preschool units, in children with sensory or physical handicaps, as well as in other children. Valuable insights into the language of children in different settings, evidence of the richness of the dialogue of some of the children and guidelines for staff in their interactions with children with communication problems were developed from the language tapes collected by the use of radio microphones in the latter stages of the study. (See Robson 1983a, Robson 1983b.)

Within the remit of that research it was not possible to study in any depth the problems of children for whom the communication problems were at least partly the result of the fact that English was a second language, of whom there were large numbers in both these cities. These children who were mainly of Asian ethnic origin were not evenly distributed across the cities and indeed formed the majority in some of the preschool units. It is equally important to consider how many of the children from ethnic minorities with communication problems in English may also have difficulties in their own language, which is of course a more difficult differential diagnosis. To assist in developing an understanding of the educational needs of children from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, whose early education may be in the same school setting, it is important to undertake an in-depth study in context and in a variety of settings. Such a study may also throw some light on the problems faced by the staffs in catering for the educational needs of children from widely varied backgrounds and with differing levels of competence in English, whether or not it is their mother tongue.

Following the completion of the preschool study referred to above it was felt that a research with a wider remit in terms of communication difficulties could provide useful insights for those involved in early education, especially if it were built on the experience gained and skills developed in the preschool study. The skills felt to be of particular value were those for recording and analysing language samples in a variety of settings. The aim would be to study children's transition from preschool to the reception class with language as a focus. In this way it would be hoped to gain insights of value in assisting teachers to capitalize on the strengths of many of these children and to provide and develop settings which would most effectively help to overcome the difficulties of a number of the children in discourse with adults and with children.

Two nursery schools in Birmingham which had been in the sample for the preschool research and which had a population of children from different ethnic backgrounds co-operated prior to the beginning of this funded research. A language sample was recorded in the nursery school shortly before transfer to primary school for as many as possible of the children due to enter the infant department in September 1982. Two primary schools were identified which were likely to be attended by these children and the co-operation of these schools in this study was enlisted: one of these schools had its own nursery class and admitted children from that class as well as the two nursery schools. In both of these primary schools children of Asian ethnic origin formed a very small minority of those in attendance, although in some schools in Birmingham that is the ethnic origin of many of the children. A third primary school was identified in a different part of Birmingham, selected because a considerable proportion of the children attending were Afro-Caribbean in ethnic origin. That school did not have a nursery class but a number of the children entering the reception class had attended one of two nearby nursery schools. It was possible to obtain a sample of language in the nursery schools for some of the children entering that school also. This was possible only after the funded research commenced and therefore these were children due to transfer in January 1983 and not September 1982. The neighbouring authority of Sandwell which also has a large number of children of Asian ethnic origin was interested in taking part in the research. Two primary schools were selected in that area, each with a high proportion of children of Asian origin and for whom English is not their mother tongue. Each of these large primary schools has its own nursery class which most children attend on a part-time basis in the year prior to entry to the reception class. Samples of language were also obtained in the nursery classes for children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds about to transfer to the infant department in these two schools. It should be noted that most of the preschool language samples were collected and transcribed prior to the appointment of the staff on the funded project.

Thus, although the funded research was staffed for only one year, it was possible to obtain a sample of language in the nursery school or class for some of the children expected to enter the five primary schools selected for in-depth study. Preschool language samples were in effect available for 25 children who entered a reception class in one of the five schools, children of a range of language competence and of different ethnic origins. The transcripts of these tapes are the basis of a separate study, where relevant they will, however, be included in case studies in the present report.

The focus of the study during session 1982-83 was on the reception classes in these five schools where seven of the nine classes were studied in depth over the session (both reception classes in one of the large primary schools, two of the four reception classes in the other and each reception class in the remaining three schools). Some information was collected on all 247 children who entered the reception class in these schools in 1982-83 and a more detailed study was made of the language of some of the children in a variety of settings in the school. This included children who had entered from nursery school or nursery class and some who had entered reception class from home without preschool education. It included children who were Asian, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous white in ethnic origin who were present in different proportions in the five schools.

How similar were the children in the five schools, in the two education authorities? What challenges would be faced by a teacher of one of these reception classes and how would this be influenced by authority policy, school policy, the physical environment as well as the children themselves? How differently would the teachers of these seven reception classes develop their curriculum and organise their classrooms? If you were a child starting school in that year in one of these schools your experiences would be very different depending on a variety of factors including the children who happened to start with you, (their background, strengths and weaknesses), the education authority within which you lived, the physical environment of the school you attended and not least the teaching style of the teacher in whose class you were placed. All of these factors interacting with your own personal qualities and competence in language would determine your success in meeting the demands of early education and benefiting to the full from its potential. These are the issues which will be explored in the following chapters with evidence from an in-depth study of the children in their various school settings over their first year in primary school. For many children the foundations for later success or failure are laid at this early stage. It is hoped that the evidence from this study will make a contribution to improving the education of young children in a multicultural society and it is to this end that the report has been organised. In addition, much of the material gathered during the course of the study has potential value for in-service work.

PART I

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOLS, CLASSES AND CHILDREN

CHAPTER 2

THE RESEARCH SCHOOLS AND THEIR SETTINGS

The aims of this study were to identify critical features in the communicative competence in the first years in school of children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and to relate these to the features of their school environments.

As was indicated in the previous chapter the main research covered the school session 1982-83 and was an in-depth study of five primary schools, from within two local education authorities, with different proportions of children from Asian, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous white backgrounds.

The Research Areas

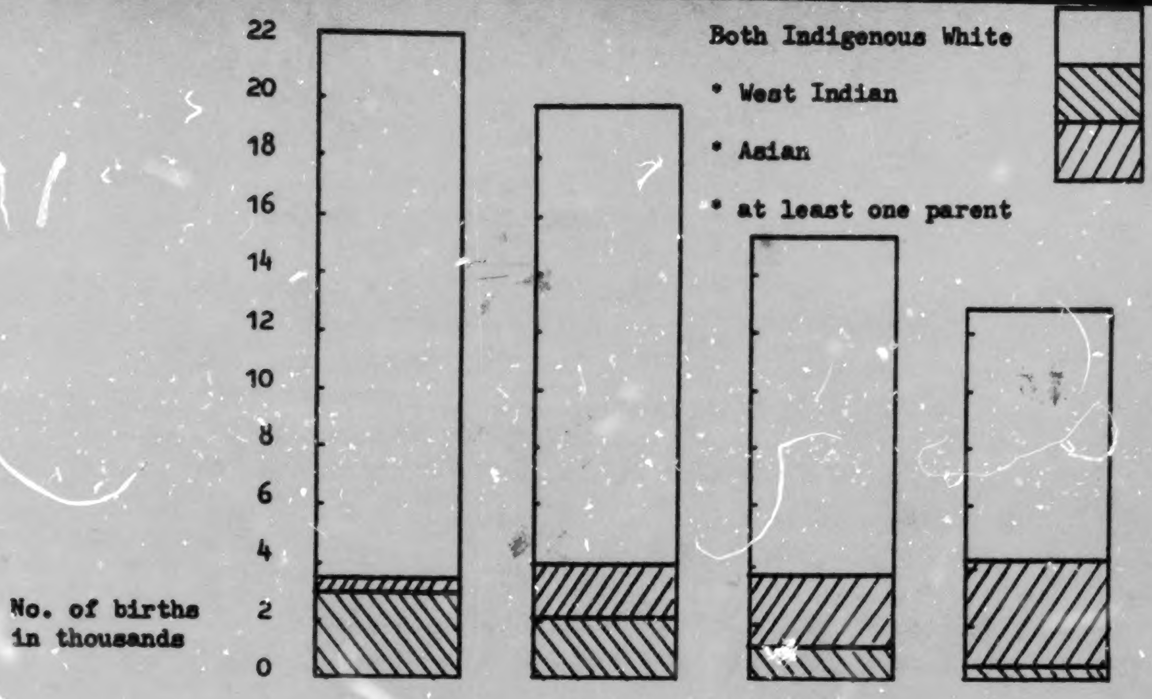
The West Midlands is in the heart of England about 100 miles north of London. Birmingham is the largest conurbation in the region with a total population of about one million while the population of Sandwell is over 300,000. Birmingham was severely damaged by bombing in World War II and the city centre has been gradually rebuilt, resulting in compact, traffic-free shopping and business areas with complex road systems going over, under and around them. Birmingham, with its large and, at that time, steadily rising population had limited space for housing development and so replaced old terraces and villas with multi-storey flats. While improving living conditions, such housing policies often bring with them problems of isolation, lack of recreational and social facilities and an inadequate environment for young children. In many areas, high-rise flats and housing schemes were built alongside existing factories, gas works, electricity generating stations and foundries, making living conditions even less attractive. Accommodation becomes more spacious as one moves out of the city centre towards areas of owner-occupied housing. While the physical environment is much improved it does not mean absence of social problems. Due to the current recession, unemployment and reduced working hours are imposing considerable financial strain on families with commitments which they can no longer meet. Sandwell, which was formed in 1974 by the bringing together of the areas of West Bromwich and Warley, has many problems comparable with those in Birmingham. As in Birmingham, pre-war housing was in places replaced by high-rise flats.

The West Midlands is a multicultural and multiracial area. Many people arrived from the West Indies in the 1950s, attracted by the prospect of employment in the West Midlands. They were followed by Asian families, some of whom were compelled to leave the Punjab and Bangladesh because of war and political unrest. The Asians brought with them about twelve major languages with separate scripts, about eight major religions and four major castes (Lobo 1978). The problems facing the Education and Social Services Departments were, and remain, highly complex. While most of the young children of ethnic minority groups now entering school are second and third generation immigrants, a few children are still entering school direct from the Indian Subcontinent or the West Indies (there were several instances within the present research population of children entering reception classes direct from overseas). Furthermore a number of children are absent from school for months while visiting relatives in the home country. The length of such absence may be extended because of the necessary medical formalities before readmission (again there were instances of such visits in the present research). In Birmingham the population percentages include roughly equal numbers born in India, the Caribbean and Pakistan while in Sandwell the proportions are roughly India 5: Caribbean 2: Pakistan 1. In addition to these which form the majority of the New Commonwealth and Pakistani groups there are within this category in both cities also first generation immigrants from East Africa, the rest of Africa, Bangladesh and the Mediterranean. At the time of the 1981 Census 8.7 per cent of the population of Birmingham of about one million had been born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan, and in Sandwell 6.3 per cent of a population of about 307,000. This information, based on Census data, does not provide information on ethnic origin but only country of birth. The main ethnic minority groups are of course not evenly distributed within Birmingham or Sandwell and in some areas may form the majority of the population. In addition the geographical distribution will vary from time to time, influenced by housing policies and differential migration within the city which can result in particular schools having sudden variations in patterns not only of children from ethnic minority backgrounds but of particular ethnic backgrounds (a changing pattern which was noted in the primary schools in this research).

The information above, based as it is on the 1981 Census, which does not provide evidence of ethnic origin but only country of birth, provides no information on the proportion of the population from ethnic minority backgrounds where these were born in Britain. Furthermore, it does not indicate the impact on the educational provision of children from ethnic minority backgrounds entering the schools. A further important feature of relevance in predictions on the likely proportions of children of different ethnic origin in schools is the evidence of birth rates, since, where these are different in various ethnic groups, this may result in dramatic differences in patterns in early education from adult population figures, or, even from those for the school population as a whole. As an illustration of this, over the years 1962-1977 there were trends with regard to live births in the City of Birmingham and the ethnic origin of the parents which are of relevance to this research. The following trends are shown diagrammatically in Figure 1(a).

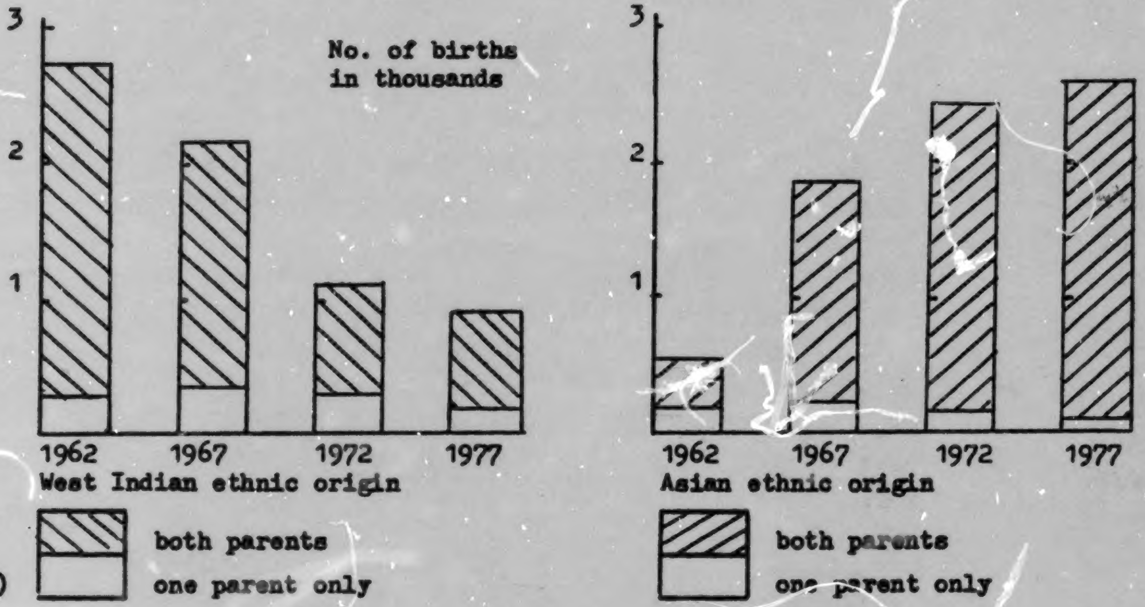
(i) The number of live births in 1977 was only about 60% of that in 1962.
(ii) The decrease was even greater where one or both parents was of Jamaican and/or West Indian ethnic group (1977 births only 34% of that in 1962).
(iii) In contrast where one or both parents was of Asian ethnic origin there was a fourfold increase over the same period.

In 1962 for 12% of births one or both parents was of West Indian origin while by 1977 the figure had dropped to 7%. By 1977, in contrast, for 20% of births, one or both parents was of Asian ethnic origin, as compared with 2.6% in 1962 (with an increase from 8.8% between 1967 and 1977). A further interesting and relevant trend which differentiates the two groups over the period 1962-1977 is the proportion of births where one rather than both parents was of the relevant ethnic group and these trends are shown in Figure 1(b). For those of West Indian ethnic origin this changed from 10% of about 2,700 in 1962 increasing to 27% of 900 in 1977. For those of Asian ethnic origin the relevent percentage were 29% of about 570 births in 1962 reducing to 2.4 per cent of about 2,600 births in 1977. The ethnic origin of both parents was known in about 98% of births.



1(a)

Year of Birth	1962	1967	1972	1977
West Indian	12.2%	10.0%	6.8%	7.1%
Asian	2.6%	8.8%	15.5%	20.0%



1(b)

Figure 1: Live births to city residents in Birmingham by ethnic group of parents 1962-1977
(a) General Trends (b) Ethnic origin of each parent
(based on tables issued by Corporation Statistician)

To summarize; not allowing for migration in or out of the City, approximately 20% of the children entering school in Birmingham in 1982 were likely to be of Asian ethnic origin (as compared with 9% ten years earlier) and 7% of West Indian ethnic origin (as compared with 10% ten years earlier). Furthermore most of the children of Asian ethnic origin would have both parents of that ethnic origin while about one quarter of those of West Indian ethnic origin would have one parent who was indigenous white in ethnic origin. This represents both a likely increase in the proportion of children entering school who are not indigenous white in ethnic origin, and also a marked increase in the proportion of such children whose mother tongue, and that of both parents, is other than English. The above information is based on tables of Ethnic Origins of Birmingham Children Born in 1963, in 1972 and in 1977 issued by the City of Birmingham Corporation Statistician (each of which shows figures for earlier years).

According to a recent report from the Central Statistical Office, City of Birmingham, the trends reported above have in general continued between 1977 and 1981, the most recent and final report entitled Ethnic Origins of Birmingham Children Born in 1981. The main difference appears to be an increase in live births between 1977 and 1981 which applies to all three ethnic groups referred to earlier. The importance of the points made so far and their relevance to early education are reinforced by the more recent evidence. To quote from the above report:

> Para. 27: By 1981 the proportion of live births to Birmingham M.D. residents formed by the ones of wholly and partly non-Caucasian* parentage had climbed to 35.5%; those of wholly and partly Asian parentage formed 25.1% and the ones of wholly and partly Afro-Caribbean** parentage 9.1%.

---

* Non-Caucasian is used in the 1981 report where non-White was used previously.

** Afro-Caribbean is used where West Indian was used previously and will be used throughout this report.

As noted for 1977, in 1981 most children who had at least one parent of Asian ethnic origin had both parents of that background (for only about 3% of such children was this not the case). In contrast in 1981 (as in 1977) for about 28% of the children born that year who had at least one parent of Afro-Caribbean origin the other parent was Caucasian. This final report related some of the birth statistics to information from the 1981 Census and while there is not space here to include further detail, it is perhaps worth noting one further point:

> Para. 30: Two out of every three births of wholly Asian parentage in 1981 were to women who had lived in the United Kingdom for less than a decade. However, the number of Asian children born in the calendar year to women with no more than one year of residence continued to fall.

Such dramatic changes in proportions of young children from different ethnic backgrounds for the City as a whole are likely also to be reflected in shifts in the particular areas of the City in which the different groups reside - partly influenced by availability of appropriate size of houses. Clearly it is likely that increasing numbers of schools in Birmingham will have either a sizeable minority or even a majority of children who have been born in the City to parents both of whom are of Asian ethnic origin. Some of these may be schools where previously there were few children of Asian origin but many of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin. The pattern is likely to be somewhat different in secondary schools from primary, and even within a primary school as between the reception class and upper classes.

The total school population in Birmingham in January 1982 was 186,345. This included 7,076 children in nursery schools and classes (about thirty per cent of whom were in nursery schools) and a further 5,798 children under five years of age on 31st August 1981, who were in infant classes. About half of those attending nursery schools or classes were in full-time attendance as were most of those in infant classes. These figures represent approximately 29 per cent of the estimated population of three and four year olds grouped together in nursery education and 53 per cent of the estimated age group in school either in nursery education or in infant classes.

The total school population in Sandwell in January 1982 was 58,547. This included 2,696 children in nursery schools and classes (mainly the latter and mainly in part-time attendance). A further 2,180 children under five years of age on 31st August 1981 were in attendance in January 1982 in infant classes (mainly in full-time attendance). The relevant percentages for Sandwell are 37 per cent of the estimated population of three and four year olds grouped together rising to 68 per cent if those in infant classes are included. While the relevant percentages in Sandwell are higher than in Birmingham, a higher proportion in Birmingham are in full-time attendance in nursery education. In both areas the proportions are higher than for England as a whole (which are 22 per cent and 40 per cent respectively). The above figures are quoted from the statistical returns from the Local Education Authorities Stats Return No. 9 (1982) and Statistical Bulletin 8/83 entitled Pupils Under Five Years in Each Local Education Authority in England in January 1982 with permission from the Department of Education and Science.

The Research Schools

Three of the five primary schools in the research have their own nursery classes. Two of the latter are large primary schools with a roll of over 380 (excluding the nursery class of about 60 part-time places). The remaining three schools are smaller with rolls of between 200 and 300. The three primary schools with nursery classes are housed in old buildings, one recently modernised, one of which has already celebrated its centenary. The remaining two schools are more modern in design.

Two of the schools in Birmingham (one an old school modernised and one a newer school) are in the same inner city area, both are social priority schools. The former school has its own nursery class and also admits children from the same two nearby nursery schools as the other school. The area served by these schools was devastated during World War II and the pre-war housing has been replaced by blocks of high-rise flats where many of the children live. Many of the children are eligible for free meals (70% in one school and 65% in the other). Neighbouring schools have a high proportion of children of Asian origin. In both the research schools in contrast over 60% of the children attending are indigenous white children mainly from socially deprived backgrounds. In each school there is a sizeable minority of children of Afro-Caribbean origin, with in each school some children of Asian ethnic origin (though in one school a very small minority). The remaining school in Birmingham, also a social priority school, the smallest school in the sample, has only about 38% of its children with both parents indigenous white in ethnic origin with an almost equal number of Afro-Caribbean origin, most of the remainder are Asian in origin. The children attending this school also tend to live in high rise flats, which surround the school. The headteacher of the above school was only in the second year in post at the time the research started. The headteacher of one of the other Birmingham schools had only taken up appointment as the research commenced, agreeing to take part in the research partly because some of the children entering the reception class had already been observed in the nursery school. The remaining headteacher in the Birmingham schools had been in post for seven years.

The two schools in Sandwell are in the Smethwick area. Both are large old schools with many children attending of Asian ethnic origin, although each has a sizeable minority of indigenous white children and a minority of children of Afro-Caribbean ethnic background. The headteachers of these schools have both been in post for many years. One of the headteachers was appointed in 1964 as head of an infant school to which the junior department was added more recently. The second of these headteachers has now retired after 27 years as headteacher of the other school. Over that period the school has changed from a large streamed junior school of white children to a primary school with a large nursery class and with a population predominantly of Asian ethnic origin. The pattern is likely to change again and there is already evidence of this in the nursery class. The numbers of one parent families coming to live in the neighbouring high-rise flats combined with the growing families of those of Asian ethnic origin were reported to be affecting the intake. Both schools in Sandwell operate a policy whereby they attempt to ensure the possibility of attendance in the nursery class on a part-time basis for one year by children due to enter the reception class. The parents of the children in the schools were reported to be committed to education and the attendance record is good. The employment situation in the area is now said to be poor and it is a recent phenomenon that many children are now eligible for free meals (65% in one school and 41% in the other).

In both Birmingham and Sandwell there are Ethnic Minority Support Services which supply schools with valuable information as well as teaching support. In Birmingham the schools served by the Multicultural Support Service are selected according to need, most of the schools served in 1982-83 having a high percentage of children for whom English is a second language: 170 of the present staff of 185 were employed in 1982-83 in teaching English as a second language. In 1982-83 none of the three Birmingham primary schools in this research had a member of the service attached to the staff. All three are small schools and all have only a minority of pupils for whom English is a second language. The staff of the service has been almost doubled in 1983-84 which will make extension of its work possible. Both Sandwell primary schools in the research with large proportions of children for whom English is a second language, had members of the Ethnic Minorities Support Service based in the school, both in the infant and junior departments. The staff of the service in 1982-83 was 75 full-time equivalents, 61 of whom were employed specifically to teach English as a second language. Such staff are placed in schools according to need and work is undertaken mainly with groups of children. Staff attend monthly team meetings at the Teachers' Centre and are supported by senior management of the service.

The two authorities had different policies with regard to admission to reception class in 1982-83, although by July 1983 comparable age-groups would have entered the reception class in both areas. In Sandwell the schools could admit in September all children who would reach five years of age during the school year, and this policy of one intake was adopted by both the primary schools in the research. It should be noted, however, that there were schools in Sandwell with more than one entry date during the session. In Birmingham in 1982-83 the normal practice was for a school to have three intakes in the year, one at the beginning of each term, September, January and April. This policy was adopted by all three Birmingham schools in the research where with some exceptions the children entered school in the term during which they would become five years of age. In 1983-84 Birmingham has changed to a policy more similar to that of Sandwell. Parents may choose to have their children admitted to a school at the beginning of the school year in which they will be five years of age. Additional support staff are however to be made available for these 'pre-reception' children on a full or part-time basis depending on the size of the age-group in a particular school. The influence of age on entry on a number of aspects will be discussed in the report. It has been noted at this stage, however, to indicate why it was necessary in order to provide comparable figures for the schools in the two authorities to base any statistics collected from the schools on the roll in July 1983 and not at an earlier point in the session.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHILDREN ENTERING THE RECEPTION CLASSES

General characteristics of the five schools in the research and the areas in which they are based have been discussed briefly in so far as the information is necessary as a context for the study. It has been made clear that the five schools are not claimed to be representative of their areas, nor even typical (if there are indeed such schools). The criteria for selection have been specified and the reasons for such a selection. There are lessons from this study for those involved in early education in other areas as well as those in the areas in which the research took place. Sufficient context about the children and their schools is required to enable readers to set their own children, schools and areas against this backcloth and thus to appreciate the significance for their practices of the experiences of these five schools in 1982-83.

As was indicated earlier the study is set in the reception classes of five schools with varied and varying proportions of children from different ethnic backgrounds. This is, however, only one of the ways in which the schools, and the children, differ from each other. Discussion will not be in terms of ethnic background specifically, except where this has bearing on a particular aspect of organisation or staffing, for example, or where certain children may be seen to have particular difficulties because their mother tongue is other than English.

The aim in the study is to identify promising developments and features of organisation which facilitate communication between teachers and children, and between children themselves. Communication which appears stimulating and which paves the way for a promising educational start - and future - for children such as these will be noted. Particular attention will be drawn to some children with communication problems - and to others highly successful in sustaining dialogue in a variety of settings (in some instances in more than one language). In this present chapter the context will be set more specifically by brief reference to features of local and national policy as they are reflected more specifically in characteristics of the children entering the infant department in the five schools in 1982-83 and the staffing and organisation within the school. Certain characteristics of the population of a given primary school may remain constant over a period of years determined by size of school, its general reputation and its catchment area as designated by the local authority. Even within these aspects there may be variations dependent on parental choice for or against a given school which in turn may be influenced by its past history, its educational traditions - and possibly the ethnic mix already in the school. Likewise the local housing policy will influence the numbers of young children of school starting age available to enter any of the local schools. Nationally the compulsory school age commences at the beginning of the term following a child's fifth birthday, local education authorities do have discretion, however, to admit children earlier, and many do. The precise pattern of admission varies from one local authority to another and, even within one authority, schools may have flexibility with regard to intake depending for example on the demand for places in their school at a given time. While in Britain considerable discretion does normally rest with head teachers on intake and school organisation they cannot remain unaffected by local and national policies - changes in one or other may indeed suddenly have an effect on the organisation within the school or pattern of children entering the reception class. Some features of the group of 247 children entering the infant departments in these five schools in 1982-83 are set out in Table 3.1 on the following page.

Table 3.1 **Distribution and characteristics of children entering reception class in five schools in 1982-83**

Characteristics	Sandwell School 1	School 2	Birmingham School 3	School 4	School 5
Totals					
as recorded by July 1983	64	64	35	40	45
Entry dates					
September	64	64	17	19	8
January			6	9	16
April	-	-	12	12	21
Nursery Education					
Yes	54 (+3)	48	32	26	30
No	7	13	3	12	12
Not known	-	3	-	2	3
Ethnic Origin					
Indigenous white	14	23	21	17	27
Asian	38	29	7	7	2
Afro-Caribbean	11	12	6	16	15
Other	1	-	1	-	1
Left					
during session	8	3	1	5	2

Notes

a) Two children in School 1 who recently arrived in the U.K. were given their first term in nursery class.

b) One child entered School 2 and on leaving there entered School 1. That child thus appears in both columns since from the perspective of the schools there were 248 registrations. Thus, entries total 248 while in references in the text to children and their characteristics this child is counted once only, with totals of 247 and consequent slight adjustments to the sub-categories.

Admission dates and age on entry

There were similarities in the pattern of date of and age on entry to the two Sandwell primary schools, and between the three Birmingham schools, with a wide difference between the schools in the two areas. By July 1983, the end of the school year, the age group which had entered the reception class during 1982-83 was similar across all five schools and by then included children who almost without exception had reached their fifth birthday by August 1983 (that is with dates of birth between July 1977 and August 1978). In the two Sandwell schools, however, children entered the reception classes on or near a single entry date at the beginning of the school year in September 1982. A few children entered mid-session by transfer from other schools for example, and several entered direct from overseas (one from India and one from the West Indies). In the three Birmingham schools in contrast there were three entry dates (September, January and April) and, with only a few exceptions, the children in these schools entered during the term in which they would reach five years of age (September entry dates of birth 9.77 - 12.77; January entry dates of birth 1.78 - 4.78; and April entry dates of birth 5.78 - 8.78). In these schools also some children were admitted from other schools mid-term.

Age on admission and entry dates are policy decisions which have inevitable organisational implications for the deployment of staff in a school. They also have implications for the children themselves as they may determine whether the children enter the infant department with their friends, how long they remain in the infant department, how many changes of teacher they may have in their first few years at school - to quote only a few implications. Each pattern has its own strengths and weaknesses some of which are interrelated to the size of intake into a particular school. The fact that the three Birmingham schools in the study were all relatively small (with an intake of between 35-45) meant that the implications organisationally were rather different from those in a larger school with an intake of say over sixty. The organisational problems are further complicated by the fact that even where date of birth on entry is defined, there may be wide and not fully predictable fluctuations in numbers entering the schools on each of the three dates. In school 5 for example the numbers entering on the three dates were 8, 16 and 19 (with a further two mid-term) and in School 3 the numbers were 17, 6 and 10 (with a further two entering mid-term). These points have been discussed in some detail because they had important implications for the children in the study and are also a necessary context for gaining insights from the study. There is flexibility even within a local policy framework for decisions by headteachers and some of the issues raised here are pertinent to staff discussions on the benefits and weaknesses of different decisions.

It is apparent from the above that in some aspects of this report it will be necessary to distinguish between the organisational patterns in the two Sandwell schools and those in the Birmingham schools, not solely because they are in different local authorities but rather because of their decisions related to their authority's policy with regard to entry. Thus children in the study of the same age have had a different length of time in the infant department depending on where they live. Account will be taken of this and its implications considered when discussing the language assessment of the children who were tested near to the time of their entry into school.

The total number of children entering the reception classes in the five schools during 1982-83 was 247 (127 in the two Sandwell schools and 120 in the three Birmingham schools). Nineteen of these children entered either mid-session in the Sandwell schools, or mid-term in the Birmingham schools, that is other than at the normal entry date. Eighteen children left these schools during the session, and one transferred to a different school in the research. The educational implications of these moves so early in their school career are important issues and where, within the research, there is any relevant material, it will be reported.

Preschool education and the research sample

Several points have already been stressed with regard to preschool education in the Birmingham and Sandwell authorities:-

1) that in both areas a higher proportion of children in 1981-82 received nursery education than the average for England;

2) that in Sandwell this was predominantly in nursery classes and part-time, while in Birmingham roughly equal proportions attended nursery schools and classes and in roughly equal proportions of full and part-time.

Since all the schools in the study were in areas of multiple deprivation within the cities it is not surprising to note that a high proportion of the children entering the reception class in the research schools had received nursery education. In Sandwell most of the children entering the research schools who had received nursery education had attended nursery classes for a maximum of one year and part-time. Most of the children in the research schools in Birmingham who had received nursery education had attended nursery schools, might have attended for two years and may well have attended full-time. The information asked of the primary schools was, however, only whether or not the children had attended nursery education. Further information will be available for the children studied in depth.

Two of the three Birmingham primary schools were selected for this study because each received children from two large neighbouring nursery schools with a multi-ethnic population. One of these primary schools also has its own nursery class and in that school all but three of the children entering reception class were known to have attended nursery school or the school's own nursery class. Two of these three had entered mid-term rather than at a normal entry date, presumably from another area. Over 60 per cent of the children in the remaining two Birmingham primary schools had attended nursery school, each having two large nursery schools nearby. Each of the two Sandwell primary schools has its own nursery class and as a policy attempts to ensure that children will have a year part-time in nursery class before entry to the reception class. Each has a 30 place full-time equivalent nursery class and an intake to the reception class of approximately sixty. By part-time attendance in the class it was possible to ensure that 84 and 75 per cent respectively of the intake had some nursery education. In these schools also some of those without nursery education were among those children who entered mid-session from another district. In one of these schools five of the seven children without nursery education entered mid-session as transfers, two other children who entered direct from abroad were given a term in the nursery class. The pattern in the other school was similar.

Thus for only a minority of this sample of children entering reception class in 1982-83 was this their first experience of an educational institution. Seventy-seven per cent were known to have already attended a nursery school or class, indeed this was true for most of those who entered at the normal entry date. The fact that most children entering these schools had already attended a nursery school or class meant that they might well enter reception class with friendships already established. In this present study there is only limited information available concerning children who entered other than at the normal date, children who were transferred from other schools or arrived from another country. It is worth stressing that such children are likely to have problems of a greater magnitude than are experienced by the other children in the age group - particularly if the changes of school are frequent, if they are associated with family or social problems and/or if they are children for whom English is a second language who will require to establish new friendships in a strange setting. For these mid-term or mid-session entries or transfers there was no such support in this new setting.

Although the majority of the children in this sample had attended preschool education, for most of those in the three Birmingham schools entry to the reception class meant a change of school; in the Sandwell schools it meant transfer to a different department in the same school. The extent to which there is a co-ordinated policy between the nursery class and the infant department may vary. Whether, for example, children who have made friendships at that earlier stage will be placed together on entry to the infant department, to what extent records will be passed on and used at the next stage. Relationships between the staffs at the different stages, policies and the attitudes of those in charge will all influence this, as will the physical layout of the building and playgrounds - facilitating or thwarting contacts between staff and between children. The problems are not insurmountable but may be considerable. Where the transfer is from not just one nursery school but several, and the children in a given nursery school may leave for one of several primary schools, the problems in co-ordination are even greater. Informal contacts are often close, as in the schools in this study, but changes of those in charge in the various schools mean re-establishing links. In both a primary school in the research and nursery schools linked with two of the schools in 1982-83, for example, there was a change of head teacher, while two of the other head teachers had only recently taken up their appointments (one nursery school and one primary school).

Clearly while for some children a change of school, or entry to school for the first time, may be a stimulus, for some children the change may place considerable strain which may be alleviated by the presence of friends or at least children who are familiar. For some children the different pattern of organisation and expectations of the reception class may be something for which they are ready and indeed which they find a challenge, for others the change from the preschool setting may be something which they find stressful or which causes them to withdraw into a somewhat apathetic state. The majority of children in this study had attended some form of educational provision prior to entry to infant school, possibly in the same school, and for a number of the children there are samples of language available in the preschool setting - from three nursery schools and two nursery classes. The dialogue in these gives valuable information on this aspect when considered together with the language samples from a range of settings during the succeeding year.

Thus entering the reception classes in these five schools were:-

- a majority of children who had some experience of 'school' and for a number of these, of that school;
- some who were experiencing their first transfer within the educational system, and, depending on their precise age, the age of entry and the particular school to which they were admitted, they might or might not be together with children with whom they had established friendships in the previous setting;
- a minority who were entering from home;
- a few who had experience of some other form of preschool provision (not necessarily known to the school) such as a day nursery or preschool playgroup;
- a few who may have had experience of a day nursery prior to entry to nursery education;
- some entering late or by transfer from some other school or country.

In this study 189 of 247 children were known to have had previous experience of a nursery school or class before the date for their entry to reception class.

Ethnic background of the children

Brief reference has already been made to the proportions of children from different ethnic backgrounds in the five primary schools and to the fact that the schools were selected so that within the study there were schools with varied proportions of children from different backgrounds. The proportions of such children in the reception classes were not necessarily the same as in the rest of the school, since in some schools the ethnic pattern was already undergoing a rapid change. It was possible thus within a single school for a teacher responsible for children at a particular stage to have a large number of children from one ethnic background and another teacher with a different age-group to have a very different ethnic composition in the class. Even the intake in the following year into a given class could change as a result of mobility, as was apparent in one of the schools. Such features are important in discussing early education or indeed any stage of education, and particularly so in areas of high internal mobility consequent on housing policies for example.

As was shown in Table 3.1 in School 1, children of Asian origin were in the majority in the reception classes (64 children were admitted, 38 of whom were of Asian origin with 14 indigenous white children, 11 of Afro-Caribbean origin and one other child). In School 2 those of Asian origin, though not in the majority, formed the largest single group - 29 children of an intake of 64 (with 23 indigenous white children and 12 of Afro-Caribbean origin). In the remaining three schools the largest single ethnic group was indigenous white children with seven, seven and two children in Schools 3, 4 and 5 respectively of Asian origin. In groups of 35, 40 and 45 children in these three schools there were 6, 16 and 15 children respectively of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin. Thus in the reception classes of two of the schools for many of the children English was not the mother tongue. At least, however, there were a number of companions of a similar ethnic origin - and with a common mother tongue namely Punjabi, which was common to most of these children. In the three remaining schools not only were there few children of Asian origin in the reception classes but they did not necessarily have the same mother tongue. Punjabi was not the mother tongue for the few children of Asian origin in the three Birmingham schools in the sample; for some it was Urdu, for others Gujerati. Thus not only were there few of them in a single school but also they did not necessarily share a common language with any other child in the intake. This is worth stressing at this point to indicate the danger of assuming that children of similar ethnic origin have a common language or religion. This will be discussed further when considering the language assessment. It seemed important to give the figures for children in the reception classes from different ethnic backgrounds in absolute terms rather than in percentages - and by school. In order to perceive the situation from the child's perspective it is important also to consider these patterns in relation to date of entry and organisation of the reception classes in the various schools.

It should be noted that for the purpose of this study ethnic background was regarded as other than indigenous white where at least one parent was known to be other than indigenous white. This was felt to be the best criterion in the circumstances since a number of the children were from one parent families and in some instances only one parent's origin was known to the school. There were only three children in the intake to the reception classes who did not fit into the three groups described above.

The total numbers of children from the different ethnic backgrounds entering the reception classes in the five schools in 1982-83 were:-

Indigenous white - 102 (41%)
At least one parent of Asian ethnic origin - 83 (34%)
At least one parent of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin - 59 (24%)
Other - 3 (1%)

Of the 18 children who left during the session, 9 were Asian, 8 indigenous white and 1 Afro-Caribbean in origin; thus the distribution was little affected by the end of the session.

Organisation of reception classes in the sample schools

Patterns of organisation in relation to dates of entry in the five schools are shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 **Reception classes in the five schools at end of session 1982-83 in relation to entry**

	Sandwell		Birmingham		
Characteristics	School	School	School	School	School
	1	2	3	4	5
Children in Reception Class					
Number at end of session					
- Reception Class A	29	17a	23b	29c	26d
B	27	15a			
C	-	13a			
D	-	16a			
Moved out of reception class during session			11	6	17
Left during session	8	3	1	5	2
Total intake	64	64	35	40	45

Notes

a) Reception children formed only half of each of these classes.

b) Five of these children were from September intake of 17
(11 moved up a class, 1 left).
6 were from January intake
12 were from April intake.

c) Nine of these children were from September intake of 19
(6 moved up a class, 4 left)
8 were from January intake (1 left)
12 were from April intake.

d) September intake of 8 were in class 2 or 3.
6 were from January intake (9 of these in class 2, 1 left)
20 were from April intake.

In Schools 1 and 2, each with an intake of over sixty children to reception classes in 1982-83, and a single entry date, different policy decisions had been taken with regard to organisation of classes in the infant department. In School 1 there were six classes in the infant department, two for each age level. The children in the 'new' intake were placed in one or other of the available classes in such a way as to give roughly comparable classes, based on any known factors, for example, from the experience in the nursery class. In School 2, the other large school, which also had six classes in the infant department, four of these classes had both first and second year children and the remaining two classes had children in their third year in school. In that school, thus, the children entering could be placed in any of four classes and would share their classroom and teacher with children with a year's experience of school. While all children entering that school were included in the language assessment which formed part of the research, only two of the four classes with 'reception' children were observed. Choice was made partly on the basis of classes entered by children for whom language samples from the preschool stage were available. Staffing on the research project would not have permitted the inclusion of all nine classrooms across the schools together with all the other important aspects included during the year. This decision did, however, allow for two classes to be observed in each of the large schools, and the one reception class in the three smaller schools. When considering later the possible diversity of experiences over their first year in school of this group of children, it should be noted that while all five schools were included, only seven of the nine possible classes formed the basis of the comments. Thus any diversity noted might have been even wider had all the classes been observed.

In the remaining three schools with intakes of between 35-45 and three entry dates, not only were there decisions on organisation to be made at the beginning of the school year, but further decisions later concerning possible reorganisation as further children in varying numbers entered in January and April. In School 3 with an intake of 35 children over the year, the group of 17 children entering in September was joined by the small group of six who entered in January. By the summer term it was necessary in order to accommodate the third intake to move most of the first intake up into the next class. Only five of the September intake (2 boys and 3 girls) remained in the reception class in the summer term. In School 4 the pattern was similar, with nine children (5 boys and 4 girls) of the 19 who entered in September still in the reception class in the summer term. Four children left and the rest moved up a class. Most of the children who entered that school in 1982-83 had at least one change of teacher during the year, others had two changes as unfortunately the teacher of the reception class left early in the New Year. The organisational problems faced by School 5 were even greater, as only eight children entered in September with a larger intake in January and an even larger intake proportionately in April. The first group were taught initially with another group of older children. By the summer term there was a reception class of 28 which contained all the summer term intake and some of those who had entered in January, the remainder of that intake having been transferred to the second class, as had most of the September intake. For two of the older girls in the first intake a further move had been necessary. A single entry date may have many drawbacks and does not solve all problems for teachers or children. However, in a smaller school, it does at least make the allocation of resources more easily planned over the school year when there is a more exact knowledge of the numbers involved.

It has been necessary to deal with this aspect in some detail since otherwise it is not possible either to appreciate the decisions made and problems faced by the teachers (and research workers), or indeed to realise the practical implications for individual children of policy decisions on entry date, age on entry, class organisation and related matters. As a consequence of the in-depth nature of this present study and its focus on communication with and between children it is possible to highlight the effects of various organisational decisions on individual children. Inevitably with the limited resources in the project and the focus on reception classes, we have less information on children who, for a variety of reasons, have been moved out of the reception class during the year, and also on the few children who were retained in the nursery class. It is important in any discussions of implications of policy decisions to bear all these children in mind, and important also to consider the progress of children who change school during their first year or who have extended absence for whatever reason.

Summary of Characteristics of Classes and Children

The characteristics of the children entering the reception classes in the five schools during 1982-83 are shown in Table 3.1, and in Table 3.2 were shown the patterns of reception classes in the five schools as at July 1983 with some indication of the period of the year during which these children had been in the reception class. From this latter table it is possible to gain at least some appreciation of the effects of the size of the school, policy of the school with regard to entry, and organisational decisions within the school on the nature of the groups allocated to the reception class teachers. In Schools 1 and 2 the teachers had children who on entry ranged from 4 to 5 years of age and many for whom English was not their mother tongue. They were able however to plan for their class over the session on the assumption that, with the exception of those who left either temporarily or permanently or who entered mid-session, the children would be their responsibility throughout the session. In Schools 3, 4 and 5, in contrast, the reception class teacher at July 1983 had few children who had been with her for the year and conversely 'reception class' children had been moved into other classes where they had now joined children of different lengths of school experience. Thus other staff in these schools were also teaching 'reception' children, if the term is used to define children in their first year in school. Furthermore a number of the children in these reception classes in July had so far been only one term or at most, two terms in school. Yet these teachers might not continue to be responsible for their education beyond the summer vacation. If Table 3.2 is considered in conjunction with Table 3.1 it becomes possible to gain some picture of the range of characteristics of the children for whose education the reception class teachers were responsible. Likewise it is possible to appreciate at least to some extent the very different groupings and also constancy of setting available to the children entering classes in even such a small number of schools within two neighbouring areas. Such differences would be multiplied were one to 'map' for such features in large numbers of schools in these areas - or to extend this analysis to other areas with more or less nursery provision, different dates of entry, sizes of school or organisational patterns.

A further aspect of relevance to the planning by the reception class teachers for the children for whom they were responsible was the extent and range of support services available, and the presence of other adults regularly in the classroom. These features can be described more effectively in the context of the detailed consideration of the classrooms which will be found in Chapters 5 and 6. A decision was made to assess the language competence in English of the children entering these five schools in 1982-83. The information from this assessment which was undertaken about the time of the children's entry to school gives further insight into the range of characteristics of the children in different classes and of children within particular reception classes. The results of this will be discussed in the next chapter in so far as this provides a context for the following discussion of the classrooms as contexts for learning. More detailed discussion on the children's language in different settings will be reserved for Part II of this report.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE SKILLS OF THE CHILDREN ON ENTRY TO SCHOOL

The intention originally was to assess the language skills of target children only, those for whom samples of language in a variety of settings would also be available. Early in this research it became apparent that it would be valuable to have an assessment of all the children in the reception classes in the five selected schools at time of entry to school. This would enable the competence of target children to be set in context and would also give a common measure on which to compare the language of children in a particular class and between classes. The Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978a)) was selected for the following reasons:

a) it was devised specifically for children about the point of entry to school
b) it assesses their ability to respond to questions of different levels of complexity
c) it requires a limited amount of language from the children to respond to most questions, even more complex questions (pointing being the response to a number of questions)
d) it provides a profile of the child's success in meeting the demands of the different levels of questions including an analytical assessment of the errors
e) the profile can be used diagnostically to plan language work for children showing limited competence (discussed in Blank, Rose and Berlin 1978b). Marion Blank, the senior author of the test, and a consultant on this research project, has also devised a framework related to the structure of the test which can be utilized in analysing children's discourse skills in 'natural' as contrasted with 'contrived' settings. Both the test and the analytical procedures were used in the preschool research referred to earlier (Clark, Robson and Browning 1982). Together they proved valuable research tools and offered diagnostic insights.

In later sections of the report the extent to which the assessment on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (PLAI) did provide insights about the competence of specific children will be discussed and its relationship to the language skills shown in other contexts. The potential of the test as a diagnostic instrument on which to base language work with individual children will also be considered later. The discussion in the present chapter will be confined to the results of the children on PLAI considered in relation to a number of relevant variables in order to enable the results to be used in the following chapter, in which the characteristics of the children in the various reception classes will be analysed.

While appreciating the value of assessing all the children on PLAI it was a matter of concern that this would be time-consuming within a one year research with only two research workers. There was a danger that a decision to undertake the assessment of over two hundred children early in the research would prevent the research workers devoting themselves to other equally important aspects. Thanks to the assistance of two teachers who were full-time students on a Master's level course to which the director of the research was tutor, it was possible to undertake this additional valuable aspect. One of the students was the head of a nursery school, the other a primary school teacher and both as part of their course were gaining experience in assessing the language of young children. The two research workers with this assistance were able to test most of the children in the study on PLAI in English. At a later stage in the project it was decided to attempt to assess the children for whom Punjabi was their mother tongue on a translation into Punjabi of the test by another Master's level student. That student with the assistance of another Punjabi speaker undertook that further aspect, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

The Preschool Language Assessment Instrument

The test is designed to assess the **discourse skills** of young children between three and six years of age. A distinction is made in the test between questions in terms of their 'perceptual distance'. Questions that require the child to apply language to salient features of perception are at the lowest level of abstraction and those that require the child to 'restructure' or 'reflect' on perception are at the highest level. Teachers place demands on children which require varying levels of abstraction and the aim of the test is to assess the extent to which the child can respond to questions at different levels of complexity. Where possible even the questions of higher levels of complexity which have been selected can be answered by pointing, or a few words, to avoid as far as possible children's understanding being underestimated because of limited ability in expressive language.

A profile is obtained from the assessment whereby for each level of questions, the child is identified as weak, moderately weak, moderately strong or strong. No global score is calculated but in addition to the numerical scores qualitative scores are obtained for those questions requiring verbal responses, based on whether the responses are fully adequate, acceptable or ambiguous. If the child does not give an adequate response, then this also is categorised as to whether it was invalid, irrelevant, whether the child said 'Don't know', or indeed failed to respond. For most children when wrong, the response is in the 'invalid' category. Diagnostically it is valuable to have this further analysis for children who respond inadequately even to the lower levels of question. Such children, the authors of the test suggest, are unlikely to cope with the communication demands of the classroom. Where children are repeatedly faced with questions well beyond their level of competence they will become increasingly frustrated, may appear distractable, or become reluctant to answer.

To assess a child on PLAI takes about 15-30 minutes. The questions on different levels (15 at each of the four levels) are interspersed making it possible in most instances to retain the co-operation and interest of even very poorly functioning young children. The test materials consist of black and white line drawings and most questions require only pointing or a few words for an adequate response, even for the higher levels of questions, although for some of these latter questions verbal answers are required.

The following are examples of questions at each of the four levels of complexity.

Level 1: Matching perception may involve naming an object, repeating a sentence, pointing to a matching object, remembering pictures of objects just seen
Level 2: Selective analysis of perceptions may involve asking the child to select a picture of something you can, for example, cut with, or saying how certain pictures differ or what you can do with something
Level 3: Reordering perception - may involve asking the child to point to the pictures that are not cups, or saying how two pictures are the same (e.g. scissors and a knife) or defining a 'cup' for example.

Level 4: Reasoning about perception may involve answers to 'why' questions, or where would the ball be if the baby dropped it, or what would happen if (with a picture available as a focus).

Background information on testing

As was indicated in the previous chapter, in two of the schools there was only one entry date in September, at which point children aged between four and five years of age started school, while in the remaining three schools there were three entry dates with an age range in each of approximately 4 years 9 months to 5 years of age. It was thus necessary to decide whether to match approximately for age at time of testing or for time in school. It was decided that to test near to school entry would provide information which could more easily be discussed in educationally meaningful terms with the teachers. Since the procedure for calculating profiles on the test does not make an age allowance the results in this study were recorded in such a way that they could be plotted against month of birth. This made it possible to consider such factors as the distribution across the age group, also within schools and classes, for children for whom English was a second language. It was also possible to check the extent to which the children showing limited competence were among the youngest on entry, and those showing a high level of discourse skills were among the older children. Because of the difference in age distribution at time of entry in the two Sandwell schools as compared with the three Birmingham schools the results were treated separately where appropriate. A few children entering Birmingham schools for whom a language sample had been collected in the nursery had been assessed at that time. The test was not therefore repeated. A check was made on these scores to determine whether these children were among the lowest scoring: this did not prove to be the case. Since these were children entering Birmingham schools in the September they were not among the younger children. A further decision was necessary, namely whether to test children who entered other than at the normal entry dates. On several grounds it was decided to omit such children of whom there were 20 (one of whom was a transfer from another research school where she had already been tested) partly because of the extra work that would have been involved both for the research team and for the schools in ensuring that they also were assessed near to entry. A further reason for their exclusion was that it was not always known at an early stage whether or not they had previously attended another school and were therefore transfers or whether they were merely late entries to school. A few children who were on the reception class lists left before they could be tested (7 children). The only other children omitted were six who were absent on a number of occasions.

Thus 215 of the total intake of 247 children were assessed on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument and the results of this will now be considered. Eleven children who were assessed left before the end of the session but their results have been included. A few of these for whom Punjabi was their mother tongue had left before they could be assessed also on the translation into Punjabi of PLAI.

Scoring of the Language Assessment on PLAI

As there is no single score awarded in the test but rather a profile based on scores on the four levels of questions, it was necessary to make a decision on the appropriate basis for the comparison of the language abilities of the children in this study. In later sections of the report the diagnostic information of the children's responses to the different levels of questions will be considered, but for the preliminary analysis a single rating was felt to be useful. This was made after consideration of the range of profiles in the research sample and the tables of profiles in the manual. The children were grouped in six categories according to their scores on the questions at the various levels as follows:-

A. Strong or moderately strong at all four levels. This is a level reached by about half the 'middle class' children in the standardisation sample for the test but by few of the 'working class' sample of four year olds (but about 25 per cent of the five year olds).

B. Strong or moderately strong on questions at three levels but weak or moderately weak on questions at the remaining level. The children in this group were responding adequately except to questions requiring for example explanations such as 'what will happen if' or 'why'?

C. Strong or moderately strong on questions at two levels. This is a level reached by about 75 per cent of the four year olds even in the 'working class' group of children in the standardisation sample. The type of questions which would give children in this group difficulty were definitions, explaining ways in which things are like each other, or explaining what has happened in a picture, all of which are Level 3 questions.

D. Strong or moderately strong on questions at one level and moderately weak rather than weak on at least one of the remaining three levels.

E. Strong or moderately strong on questions at one level but with answers weak on all other levels. This level was reached by 75 per cent of the working class sample of three year olds. Children in this category would succeed in a setting such as this in answering only questions requiring naming objects, repeating or completing a simple sentence, but not questions such as 'how are these different?' or 'show me something you cut with'. (Even children categorised D could as yet cope with few Level 2 questions.)

F. Weak or moderately weak on questions at all four levels. A profile as low as this would be expected in few children of four years of age for whom English is their mother tongue. These children were unable, even where responding, to meet the demands of this task. While some were reluctant to answer or responded with 'Don't know' to many of the questions, most did attempt at least the easier questions, though unsuccessfully.

At a later stage the qualitative pattern of scores will be discussed and the extent to which those scoring in the lowest categories did respond within this test situation or whether their low profile reflected an unwillingness to attempt to answer. This is an important diagnostic aspect in such profiles, particularly for children for whom English is a second language. Where they did respond but incorrectly it is possible to study their incorrect responses, and compare them with others and thereby understand the nature of their problems. Where they did not answer, or said 'Don't know', it is not possible to determine from this assessment the extent or the nature of their problem. This is important in considering the relationship between their scores in English and later in Punjabi for those children tested in both languages, since the implications may be different depending on the pattern of their responses in English and in Punjabi. Meantime, however, the quantitative scores for the full age-groups of children in the reception classes will be discussed.

Results on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument

Distribution of Scores

Most of the children who entered the reception class in the five schools in the sample in 1982-83 were assessed in English on PLAI near to entry to school. Of the total of 247 children 215 were assessed: those omitted were: frequent absentees, children who entered school at a different date (possibly as a transfer from another school) or who left before they could be assessed.

Table 4.1 Results for children on PLAI (N.215)

Level of Score	No. of children	%
A	31	14
B	39	18
C	64	30
D	41	19
E	24	11
F	16	7
Total	215	99

N.B. High Score A   Low Score F

As may be seen from Table 4.1 there was a wide variation within the sample in the competence of the children in responding to the demands of questions of different levels of complexity and perceptual distance. There were some children already strong or moderately strong on questions at all four levels of complexity, those rated A (14 per cent of the sample); a further group of children showed ability to respond appropriately to questions on at least three of the levels, those rated B, while 30 per cent of the children were strong or moderately strong on questions at levels 1 and 2 (rated C). Seven per cent of the children in the reception classes could not respond appropriately in this setting even to simple labelling questions (those rated F). A further 11 per cent, while able to respond to at least a number of such questions, did not yet show any evidence of responding to questions above that level (those rated E), with a further 19 per cent (rated D) showing only the beginning of such responses. Thus, 62 per cent of the sample (scoring A, B or C in Table 4.1) were competent at questions on at least two levels of complexity.

It has been stressed that for a number of questions even at higher levels of complexity an adequate answer was possible either by pointing or use of a few words. To illustrate the range of answers elicited to some of the questions one item which did require a verbal response has been selected at each level of complexity and a number of answers of different levels of adequacy given in illustration.

One child when assessed initially was graded F as she was unable to cope with questions on any levels even where pointing only was required. She concentrated throughout and seemed keen to respond, on occasion supplying a single word answer such as 'lady' to the Level 1 example above. The initial assessment was shortly after entry to reception class when she was about four years of age. She was one of the group of children whose mother tongue was not English and who was retested in English about a year later. By this time she was strong or moderately strong on all levels (now graded A). The answers she gave to these particular items are among the examples and are marked with an asterisk.

Level 1 What is the lady doing? (picture shown)
Fully adequate
1) drinking
2) drinking her tea*
3) drinking out of a cup

Level 2 Look at these. How are they different? (picture shown)
Fully adequate:
1) (One's got stabilizers) that one's for a big kid and that one's for a small kid.
2) (I got a bike with a basket) 2 wheeler and 3 wheeler.
Ambiguous: This one's a bike and this one's a riding bike.*
Irrelevant: I've got a bike and let's me go on the grass.

The part of the response in brackets above was not necessary for a fully adequate score.

Level 3 A lady went into the supermarket and saw something that was not food. What could she have seen?
(no picture)

Fully adequate:
1) She could have seen a clock*
2) A toy
3) Some children
4) A thing for the toilet

Invalid:
1) Fish paste

Level 4 If the circle were made of this colour instead of this colour would it still be a circle? Why?(picture)

Fully adequate: Yes, because it would still be round.
Acceptable: Yes, because it's already a circle.*
Invalid:
1) No, 'cos it would be a square.
2) No, 'cos the circle go in there and get square.

Clearly on this test, designed to explore the extent to which children have acquired a range of discourse skills, there was a wide range of competence. It seemed important to establish whether there were any groups of children showing particularly weak or strong performance on the test.

Results in relation to age on entry

As was noted earlier it was decided to test the children about the time of entry into the reception class giving long enough for the children to settle into school. Thus in the sample there was a wide range of ages at time of testing (from 4+ to 5+) in the Sandwell schools, and, because of the entry dates in the Birmingham schools, a smaller age range there (from about 4 years 9 months to just over 5 years). As there was inevitably a spread of time over which the testing had to be undertaken because of the limited staffing, and the need for return visits in an attempt to test absentees, there was also some further fluctuation in age on testing within the groups. It is possible however, by studying the half of the sample in the two Sandwell schools to obtain clearer evidence on the extent to which the poor scores are mainly in the youngest children and the good scores in the older children (who are, in these schools nearly a year older). In Table 4.2 the results are shown for the two Sandwell schools grouped by date of birth.

Table 4.2 **Distribution of scores on PLAI in two Sandwell schools by date of birth**

Level of scores	Numbers of children by date of birth 9.77-12.77	1.78-4.78	5.78-8.78	Totals
A	5	3	1	9
B	6	5	3	14
C	10	7	10	27
D	6	5	11	22
E	8	3	10	21
F	-	2	10	12
Totals	35	25	45	105

N.B. High Score A   Low Score F

There is clearly some evidence in Table 4.2 that most of those unable to cope with the demands of this test are in the youngest group and that few of the high scores are to be found amongst these children.

The limited discourse skills in a number of the youngest children, and the preponderance of older children in the highest scores is an important consideration from the point of view of classroom demands, particularly where children from the full age range are in a single class. While age is not the only variable it is an important one, particularly at this age where for most children these skills are still in the process of developing. Some of the younger children may still experience considerable difficulty in understanding and responding to the teacher's questions even on a relatively elementary level.

In the sample in the three Birmingham schools, all of whom were, when tested, about the age of the children in the first column of Table 4.2 (that is between 4.9 and 5 years of age) there were few children who scored very low, and a much greater proportion who obtained high scores than in the two Sandwell schools. In the Birmingham schools 110 children were tested, of whom only four scored F and a further 3 scored E (as compared to 12 and 21 respectively in Sandwell) from a group of 105 children. Furthermore, 22 and 25 children respectively scored A and B in the Birmingham sample (compared with 9 and 14 in Sandwell) in a relatively similar size of sample. From this and the evidence in Table 4.2, age would appear to be one important factor affecting the level of scoring. It should be noted that all five schools were in areas of multiple deprivation.

It is important that teachers of this age-group bear in mind the possible gulf in understanding of children as widely different in age as those represented by a single entry into school. These findings are as relevant to other areas as to Sandwell. In Birmingham for example in 1983-84 it is likely there will be a similar spread of age in the lower end of the infant department to that represented in the Sandwell sample here. It was important to study any influence of age on the scores before turning to consider whether there is evidence of a differential distribution on this test according to ethnic background and particularly the level of functioning of children for whom English is not their mother tongue, since most of the children of Asian origin were in the two Sandwell Schools, with the wider age range of children.

Results by ethnic origin

The results in PLAI are shown by ethnic origin in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 PLAI scores in relation to ethnic background

Numbers and Percentages of Children

Level of Score	Indigenous White N	Indigenous White %	Afro-Caribbean N	Afro-Caribbean %	Asian N	Asian %	Other N	Total N	Total %
A	21	24	8	14	2	3	-	31	14
B	21	24	13	23	5	7	-	39	18
C	27	31	23	41	14	20	-	64	30
D	12	14	9	16	18	26	2	41	19
E	4	5	3	5	16	23	1	24	11
F	1	1	-	-	15	21	-	16	7
Totals	86	99	56	99	70	100	3	215	99

N.B. High Score A Low Score F

The numbers in each group are small and it is clearly dangerous to draw conclusions from small differences in percentages between the groups in their level of score. It is clear, however, that most of the low scores are among the children of Asian origin for whom English is a second language, and likewise that most of the high scores at levels A and B are in the indigenous white and Afro-Caribbean groups. It was only children scoring at this level who were able to respond to questions at levels 3 or 4. Thus a sizeable minority of the indigenous white and Afro-Caribbean children, particularly the younger ones, would still have difficulty with questions other than at level 1, as would most of the Asian children in this sample. It should be noted that here we are considering children on entry to school most of whom spent some time in preschool education, in many instances, however, children from socially deprived backgrounds. In other similar areas but with limited preschool educational provision there could be much greater proportions of children who would fail to meet the demands of such a test. It is equally important to stress that there were children who responded on an impressively high level to questions at all four levels; including two of the children of Asian origin; that not all the low scorers were younger children, or the high scorers older children. Furthermore although there are warnings from these results about the dangers of questioning on a level beyond a child's present competence it is also important to assist the child to develop competence in responding to progressively more complex and perceptually distant demands, returning as and when appropriate to illustrations and demonstrations from within the perceptual field, at the child's level. (See Blank, Rose and Berlin 1978b for examples of such strategies in teaching.) Furthermore it is important that teachers be aware of the impressive discourse skills exhibited by some young children under challenging conditions on entry to school.

Clearly many of the children of Asian origin in this study, for whom English is a second language, had problems in responding to this test appropriately in English, although most had experienced some preschool education on a part-time basis. For a number of those whose mother tongue is Punjabi it was possible to repeat the test with the questions in that language and to allow them to respond in Punjabi. From that it was possible to ascertain whether or not they could cope with the higher levels of questions in that language. The results of that testing will be discussed later. Samples of dialogue are also available for a number of target children from each ethnic background and different levels of competence. From these it was possible to explore whether in these other settings (preschool or in the reception class - or playground) the children's dialogue showed evidence of an ability to use and respond to questions of differing levels of complexity. The results of this test will be considered later in the light of that further evidence. The teachers were also shown examples of questions at each of the four levels and asked to compare the children in their class on their ability to respond to a sample question at each level. These responses will also be considered in relation to the children's test performance in a later section devoted to qualitative analysis of the language of the children in different settings.

Patterns of responding

The Preschool Language Assessment appeared to appeal to most children, even those who were not capable of scoring at higher levels. To a number of questions, pointing is the only response required, to others a minimum verbal response is necessary. The fact that simple questions are interspersed with the more difficult questions also assists in maintaining the child's interest and confidence. A qualitative analysis is possible for a number of the questions and a note is made as to whether the child's wrong responses should be regarded as invalid or irrelevant. A full analysis of the responses will not be considered here. It is, however, worth considering the extent to which the children were willing to 'risk take' and give an answer which was wrong. From such answers it is often possible to plan help for the child and frame the learning situation to help the child progress to more complex discourse. Children who do not answer, or merely say they don't know the answer when in doubt do not supply such guidelines for the teacher. There are of course children who score high and give few wrong responses, knowing what they know, and, what they don't know. One child who scored at grade B, for example, gave only three invalid answers, no irrelevant ones, said 'Don't know' to 17 and failed to answer one question. Where a child remains silent to the majority of the questions it is difficult to know how much faith to put in the results. It could be that the child is overawed by the test situation, the tester, or, has resented being taken from the classroom! Where a child has given evidence in this setting, however, of the ability to respond to much more complex questions than appeared the case in other settings (as was indeed true with a few of the very high scoring children) this is valuable knowledge for the teachers. Faced with a large proportion of the class with problems in discourse it is difficult to meet the needs of the most able - particularly if they are rather reticent in responding. There were some very able children in this sample, from each ethnic background. Evidence of this was drawn from their test responses combined with their dialogue in a variety of settings, including in some instances preschool, sometimes as initiator, as well as responder. Such abilities can only be demonstrated fully, however, given someone willing and able to respond at a similar level - and also willing to initiate on occasion. For some children PLAI was obviously not only interesting but challenging also and they rose to the occasion. In a one-to-one setting with an adult some children show language competence that they cannot sustain in a more distractable large group situation, or when alone with other children. One challenge in the classroom is to provide such opportunities for children to develop their oral language competence through challenging experiences with an adult and with other children. Some classroom settings, organisational plans, and teaching styles, appear to facilitate such stimulating language exchanges, others make this less easy. These are points which will be discussed in subsequent chapters and in the case studies.

Most children did respond to the majority of the questions they were asked when tested on PLAI. Only 37 children of 215 tested were more likely to remain silent or say 'Don't know' rather than attempt to answer and give an answer which proved wrong. Among this group were children scoring at all levels except A, the highest level, where there would of course be few wrong responses. There were similar proportions of those scoring C to F, but a preponderance of the children who were very young when tested. Most children remained silent rather than said 'Don't know' and this was particularly true of the children of Asian origin even when they scored higher than E or F. Thus with these children whose mother tongue was other than English and who failed to respond to a large proportion of the questions it is difficult to determine how accurate an assessment of their present competence in English this testing represents. Some are likely to have refrained from answering because they did not understand the question (or the expected type of response)! There could be other reasons for a reluctance to risk-take in this setting. In comparing the responses of those who were later tested in Punjabi it is important to take account of the qualitative aspect of their responses on the two occasions. Should those who frequently remained silent when tested in English at this stage do likewise in Punjabi when that was a repeat of the test (later in the school year, in their mother tongue and by a tester for whom it was her mother tongue) then it seems more likely to be a response-pattern than to be peculiar to this testing. In the following chapter the characteristics of the children entering the various reception classes will be discussed, and, where relevant the results of the assessment on the language test in English will be noted. Differential results and responses of the children tested in both English and Punjabi will be discussed later and related to the evidence of their language in other settings.

CHAPTER 5

RECEPTION CLASSES: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE CHILDREN AND IN THE CLASSROOM SETTINGS

In the present chapter the aim will be to draw together some of the features of the children in the sample to give a clearer picture of the composition of the various reception classes. Likewise characteristics of the schools, their physical layout and organisation will be discussed in such a way as to relate these to the characteristics of the children entering reception class. This chapter is intended as a backcloth to the discussion of teaching approaches and strategies - the dynamics of the classrooms which will be reported in the following chapter. The focus, particularly in the following chapter, will be mainly on the seven classes observed. The two classes with 'reception' children omitted (both in the same school) would in many ways be comparable to the two in that school which were included, particularly with regard to the features discussed in this chapter. All four classes in that school contained a similar range of children, and children in their first and second year in school.

The Children and their Characteristics

From the information in the preceding chapters it should be apparent that many of the children in this sample had some experience of preschool education and thus on entry to reception class were not encountering their first experience of a school. For a number of the children it was a different school which they now entered, and possibly at a different time from their friends. In the larger schools, which happened also to have only one intake and therefore a wider age range, children entering on a particular date were more likely to have their friends from preschool enter with them. In one of these schools there were two reception classes, and in the other school there were four, and thus children might still find they were not in the same class as their particular friends. It was noted earlier that the schools differed in the proportion of children from different ethnic backgrounds entering reception class, as well as in the proportion in the senior classes in the school. Interrelated was the fact that for many of the children, in two of the schools particularly, English was not their mother tongue. For the majority in these two schools the mother tongue was Punjabi, for a few Urdu. Even among such children there was a wide diversity both in the children's competence in their mother tongue and in English, also in their willingness to use their mother tongue. Furthermore some of the children of Asian ethnic origin did not speak Punjabi or Urdu but a Mirpuri dialect. In the particular Birmingham schools in the study not only were there few children of Asian origin but also there were unlikely to be others in the class who had the same mother tongue, which might, for example, be Urdu or Gujerati. These points will now be highlighted by looking at some of the characteristics of children entering particular reception classes. This should help the reader to appreciate the situation in which these children found themselves on entry to school and the range of characteristics of the children whom particular teachers had in their classes during the session. It should be noted that there were both boys and girls in the reception classes in all five schools.

School 1

This was one of the two large schools with a single intake at the beginning of the session. In each reception class there were about thirty children (with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls), the numbers fluctuating during the session as children entered or left. In one of the classes, for example, five children left and four entered during the year. In both classes the majority of the children were of Asian ethnic origin outnumbering the total number of indigenous white children and those of Afro-Caribbean origin combined. Two of the children in one class had recently arrived in Britain. Most children in both classes were known to the school as they had already attended the nursery class on a part-time basis in the previous session. There were, however, children who entered with no experience of preschool education including some who entered mid-session. The age range of the children in each class on entry was between about 4 and 5 years of age. The mother tongue of about half of the children in these two classes was not English and for most of these it was Punjabi (though for a few it was Mirpuri dialect).

Most of the children in these classes were assessed on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (PLAI) in English about the time of entry as part of the research (the results were not revealed to the schools during the study). Slightly fewer children in one of the classes were assessed because of the greater number either entering or leaving mid-session. In both classes there was a wide spread of competence in language as measured by the test. About half of the children assessed in each class showed very limited discourse skills on the language test (that is scored F or E). Several children in each class, and from each ethnic background on the other hand were able to cope with questions on at least three of the four levels of difficulty in English (that is scored A or B). Among the children whose mother tongue was Punjabi there were in these classes children who scored high in English but were not able to or would not respond in Punjabi, there were several who although at the beginning of the year they scored low in English were able to cope in Punjabi when tested at the end of session. This issue will be discussed further in a later section.

The characteristics of the children in this school have been given in some detail as it will now be possible more briefly to indicate similarities and differences for the other schools. It was also important to give sufficient detail to show how varied and complex were the dimensions on which these children differed and which would be of relevance to how successfully the children were likely to adjust to school. This also shows the nature of the group of children whose early education was the responsibility of these two reception class teachers in consultation with the promoted staff in the school.

School 2

In this the second of the large schools, the two classes studied (of the four with reception children) were of comparable size: only half of the children in each class were in their first year in the infant department. In these two classes about half of the 'reception' children were of Asian ethnic origin with some indigenous white children and two children (a boy and a girl) in each class of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin. In this school as in School 1, the majority of the children had attended the school's own nursery class part-time. In this school all but four of the 'reception' children in these two classes were assessed in English on the language test, and as in School 1 there was a wide range of competence. In each class there were several children who on the test failed to respond adequately to many of even the simpler level of questions (rated only F or E on the test). There were other children who demonstrated impressive discourse skills on the test. In these classes also some of the children showed a better ability to respond when assessed later in

Punjabi. Two children in these classes showed a high level of discourse skills both in English and Punjabi and two scored low in both languages. Thus the children whose early education was in this school also entered classes with companions of widely varied backgrounds and competence in language whether in English or Punjabi. The age range of the children on entry here also was from about 4 to 5 years of age. They had the advantage of entering classes where half of the class had already a year's experience of school (although not with the same teacher) but the disadvantage that fewer of their preschool companions would be in the same class (as they would here be distributed across four classes). Also they would have to share their teacher with older and probably more competent children and might have to 'select', during the day, aspects and instructions which were intended for them rather than their older companions. Such filtering may not be a problem for older children or children with well developed discourse skills in language. It would be pertinent to explore the strengths and weaknesses of these arrangements for children who are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and children, some of whom have as yet very limited language competence of a kind necessary to cope with the discourse of classroom instruction. The interplay of the characteristics of children and organisational features of the school and classroom will be discussed further when considering the dynamics of the classroom.

In each of the remaining three schools 3, 4 and 5, there were three intakes during the year, in September, January and April - and the age range on entry was more limited ranging from about 4 years 9 months to 5 years. The number of children entering differed somewhat unpredictably from one intake to another within a school, as mentioned earlier. This presented organisational problems for these schools - and for the children, some of whom might, because of this, be moved to one or more different classes during the year. This was related also to the fact that all three schools were more limited in size and would therefore not have a separate class for entrants at each entry date which might have been more nearly possible in School 1 and School 2.

School 3

In this school, 17 children entered the reception class in September, all of whom had attended either the school's own nursery class or a neighbouring nursery school. The majority of the children were girls and half were indigenous white children with a few of Afro-Caribbean origin and three of Asian origin (one of whom left shortly afterwards). All but the last child were assessed on the language test and, as in the schools discussed so far, a range of levels of competence was found in the group. In this school, although a designated social priority school, most of the children were able to cope with questions on several of the levels. The two children of Asian origin in the class who were tested were both competent in English.

These children were joined in January by a further six children (five of whom were boys, thus redressing the balance). All but one had attended nursery school or class and most were indigenous white children. In this group also there was a range of competence on PLAI. In this school the number of children admitted to school on the third entry date in April necessitated some reorganisation of classes. In this final intake were four children whose mother tongue was not English (two entered mid-term, and neither had attended nursery school or class). By the summer term four of the boys and seven of the girls who had entered in September had been moved out of the reception class into another class. Thus in the summer term the reception class consisted mainly of children in their first or second term in school, while some of the September intake had by then to adjust to both a new group of children and a second teacher. The organisation of classes in the school needed to maintain appropriate class sizes was not one which in a school such as this could be planned with any finality early in the session since at that time neither the precise number of children entering on each admission date, nor those likely to leave could be known. Such decisions had to take account of the needs of the other children in the school as well as of the children entering the reception class. It is clear from the information given so far that the reception class teacher in this school had a number of rather different problems from those in the two schools discussed previously - as had the children.

School 4

The pattern in the second of the smaller schools, also a 'social priority school' was in some respects similar, as were some of the problems and characteristics of the children. Here also with three entry dates it became necessary by the summer term to transfer a number of the September intake to another class. This still left a reception class in that term of thirty children, nearly half of whom were in their first term in school. The reception class teacher had left on maternity leave during the second term, thus most entrants had had two teachers and some had three teachers by the summer vacation. This school had no nursery class and while about 60 per cent of the intake had received nursery education in one of the neighbouring nursery schools the rest entered from home. The September intake in this school of 19 were mainly boys and most of the children were of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin, with one boy of Asian origin. While the pattern varied in the two remaining intakes, these still had children from different ethnic backgrounds. As in the other schools discussed so far there was a range of competence in language from at least one child in each intake who was unable to meet the demands of the test to a child able to respond to questions on all four levels of difficulty. There were children of each ethnic origin who scored high on discourse skills. It is perhaps worth noting that in the intake to this school in 1982-83 there were three pairs of twins, all boys (two indigenous white pairs and one pair of Asian ethnic origin). The scores of the two members of each pair on PLAI were interestingly very similar.

School 5

The final school in the study was also a relatively small school and one with three entry dates and thus with children's age on entry from about 4 years 9 months to 5 years of age. This school faced another problem that although by the end of the session it had the largest intake of these three schools, in September only eight children entered (in contrast to 21 in April). This first intake was therefore taught initially with a group of older children who had so far made limited progress. By the summer term all the September intake had moved up at least one class as had some of the January intake, while a few of the September intake had moved for a second time. Since the age range eligible for admission at each entry date was comparable, this pattern could scarcely have been predicted. The majority of the children in this school were indigenous white children, with a number of Afro-Caribbean and only two Asian in ethnic origin (in different intakes, one of whom left during the year). This school did not have a nursery class and while a number of children who entered had attended one or other of the nearby nursery schools, as in School 4, this was true for only about 60 per cent of the children. In this school also there was evidence of a full range of scores on the language test on entry to school with, it should be stressed, several children scoring high on questions at all levels of complexity.

Enough information has now been given to indicate the range of characteristics of the children in a particular class to whom these young school entrants were required to relate. Some might know many of the children in their class; some would have few from their own ethnic background; some would have no other child in the class who spoke their mother tongue. For some this was their first experience in school, while others had already spent a year or more full or part-time in nursery education and were even accompanied by friends on their entry to the reception class. These descriptions where the focus is progressively on particular schools, classes and intakes should help to pinpoint the context with regard to classmates for the children in this study and of potential playmates in the playground and elsewhere. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the similarities and differences in the school and class environment in which these children spent their first year in the infant department (or for the January and April intakes their first two terms or one term).

The classroom contexts

A number of people would be involved in determining when these children would enter school, which particular class they would enter and whether there would be any changes of class for them during the year. The allocation of particular teachers for the reception classes had also to be decided in each school. In the two large schools, Schools 1 and 2, there were two and four classes respectively with 'reception' children and there was therefore also the question of which children to place in particular classes. Most children had attended the school's own nursery class, and it was possible therefore to include in the decision-making both the possibility of placing certain children in the same class and the possibility of separating known incompatibles, or children thought likely to cause difficulties if placed together. It was also possible to consider whether or not to place siblings in the same class. With more than one reception class in a school it was also possible to consider potential incompatibilities between certain children and particular teachers, with some knowledge based on information from the nursery class. None of the teachers of reception classes were probationer teachers and most had considerable experience of teaching, though not necessarily of reception class children. In only one school was the teacher new to the school that year, School 4, and unfortunately she was the teacher who left and had to be replaced by another teacher who was also new to the school. The length of experience in their present school of the reception class teachers varied from the teachers referred to above to one teacher with nine years in a particular school. When considering the dynamics of the classrooms in the next chapter the similarities and differences in the teachers' approaches will be discussed. It seemed pertinent, however, to mention the teachers briefly at this stage before turning to the physical environments which the children entered.

The children entering three of the schools, Schools 1, 2 and 3 were accommodated in old buildings which had been modernised to some extent and each had a nursery class also on the site. One of the schools, School 1, which earlier in its history was a very large crowded school has by virtue of its falling roll considerable available space and even empty rooms which allowed greater flexibility in timetabling of any accommodation requiring to be shared by more than one class. This school also had ample space and even double classrooms available to the reception classes. In the other large old school, School 2, the classrooms were small and with high ceilings. In each of these three old schools children had to go some distance to reach the toilets - along the corridor in two and across the playground in the other. The distance of such facilities would clearly have organisational implications in the classroom. Where the toilets were across the playground it was necessary to have more formal permission 'to go'. In the two schools where the toilets were along the corridor, in one a long corridor with racks of coats, a visit could be a somewhat frightening experience for a young child of perhaps only four years of age. The children entering either of the two remaining schools, 4 or 5, were in a new building which was more compact, where the toilets were readily available to the reception class children, actually connected to the classroom. While there were advantages in the newer buildings there were also disadvantages in one of the schools in particular, School 4, where there was no free space and where the hall was also required for dinners and therefore only available at certain times for other purposes.

The extent to which and ways in which the schools utilized the available space varied considerably but a discussion of this in any detail is beyond the remit of this report. Comment is thus confined to aspects thought to be of particular significance to the early experience of school of the children in the study. The size and layout of the classrooms will be relevant to the ways in which the teacher can organise the day as will the other available resources beyond the classroom, both physical and material. The flexibility with which the teacher can utilize these will also affect the extent to which the activities will require to be preplanned for the day or week.

Since all children will spend part of their time in the playground, an exciting and stimulating experience for some and a miserable and traumatic one for others, brief mention will be made here of the arrangements and physical layout. The infant department had a separate playground in all but one of the schools (and this is now the case in that school also). Even that, however, meant for these young children they could be one of about 100 or 200 children during playtime and dinner-time. In some of the schools most children stayed for dinner and would therefore have a lengthy period of time to occupy. The supervision in the playground at that time was normally by 'dinner ladies' - although in one school in winter there were hobbies clubs which were open even to the younger children. The organisation of dinner also varied from school to school influenced partly by the views of the staff and partly by the physical amenities available. In one school, for example, there was family service with the same tables each session, in another, self-service. It is pertinent to consider the extent to which the organisation for playtime, lunchtime and the serving of school dinners facilitates or is detrimental to the adjustment of young children to school. It is also relevant to consider whether particular arrangements facilitate communication between these young children which may contribute not only to their happiness and adjustment but also to their development of communicative competence and progress in the classroom. The space available and layout of playgrounds are only some of the features of relevance and these are features because of which, or in spite of which, dynamic interactions can be 'arranged'. In one playground, for example, it was possible in a single playtime to photograph a variety of children of different ages clearly so absorbed in a range of activities that they seemed unaware of the camera. In another setting, it was difficult to capture any children in animated groups during playtime. How important is this and to what extent can it be taught - or facilitated? In a later section it will be possible to discuss some of the language samples obtained in playgrounds.

Ethnic Minority Support Services

In the two large schools, Schools 1 and 2, where for a majority of the children English was a second language, there were members of the EMSS working in the school and with children from the reception classes as well as from other classes. The nature of the work and ways in which these staff related to their service and the school in which they were based will be discussed in the following chapter in the light of observations of children from the reception classes attending such classes. The teachers involved in the two schools were from the same service but chose to organise their work in different ways. Since most of the children in these schools had already attended the school's own nursery class it was possible at an early stage to assess their language competence informally and for the teacher with particular responsibility for the infant department in consultation with the nursery class teacher to decide who were in the greatest need of help. Where children entered direct from home, or mid-session they also could, where necessary, be nominated for such assistance.

School 1 had ample accommodation and was able to allocate to the two EMSS teachers working with children in the infant department a large airy classroom with facilities for a Wendy House. In that school a group of about 12 children attended that class each morning before break and another group, whose competence in English was somewhat less limited, attended each morning after break: each group was taught for about an hour co-operatively by the two EMSS teachers. All but seven of the children of Asian ethnic origin in the two reception classes in 1982-83 attended one or other group usually on a daily basis and most were still attending into the beginning of 1983-84. Three children of Afro-Caribbean origin were also attending; one of these had not attended nursery class, the other two had a level of competence in English as limited as many of those of Asian origin (they scored E on the language test in the research). All but one of the other children of Afro-Caribbean origin had scored high on that test. Three of the children of Asian origin who were not receiving help had scored high on the language test in English shortly after entry: they proved later not to be testable in Punjabi. The remaining four were able to be tested in both languages; two scored low under test conditions in English but high in Punjabi; two children scored comparably in both languages, one high the other relatively high. As noted earlier, these results were not known to the school during the period of the research. The numbers of children withdrawn for help by the EMSS teacher in that school meant that nearly half of the children from each of the reception classes spent part of each morning being taught by specialist teachers outside the reception classroom. The arrangements and the regularity of the assistance meant that the reception class teachers knew who would be out of the class and the duration of time and they could plan accordingly.

In School 2 where space was at a premium the two EMSS teachers working with reception children used a small office - and a small staffroom: this gave little possibility of permanent displays and made access to equipment more difficult. One of the teachers who was part-time was on maternity leave for much of session 1982-83 and her work was undertaken by a relief teacher. This meant, of course, for some of the children a change of support teacher during the session. Both EMSS teachers in this school worked with small groups of children for 10-15 minutes on a flexible basis on structures which might be needed for work in the classroom. In this school there were four classes with 'reception' children (the other half of each class being children in their second year). Virtually all the reception children of Asian ethnic origin attended one of the EMSS teachers for small group intensive help for at least part of their first year and most continued into their second year, that is nearly half the reception children per class. The attendance of two children was stopped because their English was found to be excellent. It is worth noting that these two children both scored high on testing during the research on the language test in both English and in Punjabi; neither was, however, in one of the two classes in the observation study. The more flexible arrangements, shorter time duration, smaller groups, together with the different class organisation of first and second year infants and more limited space all meant rather different adjustments for children and for teachers in the two schools.

In this chapter a background has been set which it is hoped will enable the reader to begin to picture the children in their physical environment. Details have been supplied in as far as seemed necessary to achieve this - and as was compatible with avoiding identifying particular children, their characteristics and level of functioning. In the following chapter it will now be possible to consider the interaction of these children with each other in the classroom and the approaches of the different teachers to the early education of the children for whom they were responsible.

CHAPTER 6

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN RECEPTION CLASSES AS CONTEXTS FOR LEARNING

The adjustment to school, progress and range of learning of a particular child will be influenced by the skills and characteristics of classmates as well as the curriculum, teaching style and personality of the teacher. Learning in school, in contrast to home, takes place in a social context which includes a large number of children of about the same age whose competing needs must also be met by the teacher. In the preceding chapters, some of the characteristics of the children forming the seven classes to be discussed were noted. While the focus here will be on similarities and differences between these reception classrooms as contexts for learning, the different patterns of skills and the characteristics of the children entering a given class must also be borne in mind. One child may be entering the reception class at four years of age, another at five years of age: both may be in the same classroom. One child may be entering direct from home, another may be transferring from preschool education, even within the same school. Yet another child may enter mid-term or on transfer at this early stage from another school. A child may be one of only a few whose mother tongue is not English and may or may not have others with a similar mother tongue. Even where a child's mother tongue is English that child may still have severe problems in communicating with adults and other children, or may be limited in understanding of the language of others. For some children the whole new context of the reception class may thus be a bewildering and perhaps even a frightening place, as may be the playground. Furthermore a number of these characteristics may well be found in a single child multiplying the likelihood of stress and a record of failure at an early stage in the school career. A child who might succeed in the social context of one classroom might, because of its social context, fail in another.

Already by the time children enter the reception class they have developed not only a range of competences in language, but also, interrelated with these, features which result in their being readily accepted by other children as leaders or followers - or on the contrary unacceptable in most settings. The child who is socially acceptable, even if under stress and of limited language competence, may be supported by his or her classmates both in the classroom and in the playground, and may seek and receive reassurance from the adults also. There were children who appeared more or less acceptable to other children and to the adults, whatever their age relative to the others in the class, their language competence, or their ethnic background.

Some children demand, and receive, greater attention than others; some more reticent or who are socially less acceptable may succeed rarely in obtaining extended attention from the teacher. Studies of classroom interaction have shown how seldom it is possible for teachers, in that busy setting with such a variety of demands, to maintain extended discourse with small groups of children or individual children. Furthermore, it has been shown also that the attention of teachers is differentially shared amongst the children in a class, some receiving a greater amount of attention, others only a limited amount. Finally, it has been noted in a number of studies that while most of the interactions which some children have with the adults are stimulating and positive, other children, for a variety of reasons, even where addressed frequently by adults, are seldom in receipt of other than disciplinary or disapproving remarks (see Clark 1983 for further discussion of this topic and references).

In this chapter some of the features which differentiated the classrooms will be discussed and ways in which they might have implications for the children will be examined. The language samples from a variety of settings of target children discussed in later chapters will enable more specific points to be made on ways in which the various classroom contexts may facilitate or inhibit development of communication in specific children.

Clearly there are external constraints which influence ways in which a particular teacher can plan the curriculum and implement this in practice, constraints over and above the characteristics of the range of children in the class and the teacher's own preferred style. Some of these are, as was indicated earlier, determined by local authority policy and school policy with regard to admission. Likewise the staff with particular designated responsibilities within the school will to some extent determine the curriculum at various stages in the school, the resources and materials available for its implementation. The extent to which resources are held centrally or distributed to individual classes may also influence the extent and regularity of their use. In the present research within which seven reception classes were studied there were in Schools 1 and 2 two parallel classes. In these pairs of classes it is easier to assess the influence of a particular teacher on the approach, materials and general dynamics of the classroom than where there is only one reception class. In one of the three schools with only one reception class, School 4, there was a change of teacher mid-year. Assessment of the influence of this was, however, to some extent confounded for the research by the fact that there were in that school three entry dates and therefore the groups of children did not remain constant throughout the year.

This report is not the place for a detailed discussion of the reception classes in the schools in the study. The aim of this aspect of the research was to gain systematic information about the setting and language contexts of the classrooms. The information was obtained from a variety of sources including the teachers in charge of the infant departments, the class teachers themselves, from visits on a number of occasions during the year to assess children and to record language and to make video recordings of the contexts. In addition to these sources of information, arrangements were made systematically to visit each of the seven classrooms three times during the year and for an observer to spend half a day on each occasion with the children in the classroom, or, if they went as a group elsewhere, to accompany them to the other settings. These observations took place about mid-term in the autumn term, early in the spring term and about mid-term in the summer term. The aim of these observations was to note the organisation of the classroom; the curriculum content and planning and the resources and their utilisation, both adult and material resources.

Classroom profiles

In attempting to identify the similarities and differences between nursery education and education in reception classes one useful categorisation employed in the research published as And So To School (Cleave, Jowett and Bate, 1982) was the play/work continuum, or perhaps more aptly the dichotomy. In most nursery schools and classes 'play' was the term used to describe most of the activity throughout the day, including the valued aspects in which the children were engrossed. In contrast, on entry to reception classes the term 'play' seemed to have a different connotation and defined that which you did when you had finished your work (or what you did in nursery school but don't do in 'big' school). A further dichotomy noted in the research referred to above and which was valuable in analysing similarities and differences between nursery classes (immediately before transfer) and reception classes (shortly after transfer) was the extent to which and proportion of the day during which 'choice' of activities was in the hands of the children themselves. It was found that much more choice was normally available to children in a nursery setting than in the reception class, and for a greater part of the day. Either taken to extreme clearly has its disadvantages as well as its advantages. The flexibility found in the preschool setting could allow a child to concentrate on a chosen activity for long periods of time if he or she was absorbed in it. On the other hand it could result in some children having, over a relatively long time-scale, a rather limited diet of activities because they did not know how to play, had very limited language, or were unacceptable to other children. Children could become drifters on the fringe of activities, never completing anything (see Clark and Cheyne 1979). On the other hand fascinating, and valuable dialogue between groups of children could develop stimulated by the materials, and in some instances following up adult led activities. Some of this dialogue, while not led by or in the immediate presence of an adult, may indeed owe much to the stimulus of activities available, ideas and language generated by the adults (see Robson 1983a and b). Clearly teacher-directed activities in the reception class have value for specific purposes, in some settings, and for particular children. For some children and with some activities the result may be a less stimulating diet than in preschool, or even less advanced activities than these same children were capable of sustaining in a different context at an earlier stage. For other children the length of time they may be expected to concentrate and the 'work' they may be required to undertake in the teacher-directed activities in the reception class may be beyond their capabilities. Furthermore, many children still enter reception classes without having attended preschool education, and for these children at least some features of the preschool setting may be desirable in the reception class. Some of the contrasts observed in the research referred to earlier (Cleave et. al. 1982) with regard to play/work and choice/direction were noted for some of the target children in the present research. Were teachers in preschool and reception classes given an opportunity to observe target children in the two settings, that might be a valuable stimulus to an exchange of ideas and possibly re-appraisal of the appropriate balance of activities and organisation. Some children in the present study appeared more stimulated and challenged by the preschool setting, others by the reception class.

There are perhaps two other aspects of the ethos of classrooms in early education which are worth introducing at this stage and which are features by which classrooms can usefully be distinguished. The first of these is the extent of mobility encouraged and permitted in the classroom. The young child in the nursery school or class in Britain is normally allowed not only considerable choice of companions and activities for much of the day but related to this considerable mobility. The times when all the children are required to sit and to stay seated are normally few and usually relatively short in duration. In contrast in the infant department, mobility may or may not be encouraged or permitted. The other feature of behaviour which may distinguish most nursery schools and classes from some reception classes is the extent to which talk by children is encouraged or permitted. In preschool education facilitating and encouraging dialogue would be seen as one important goal. The relative importance that oral language has for infant teachers would vary considerably. The extent to which not just talk to the teacher, but dialogue between children is either permitted or actively encouraged as part of the curriculum (or work) in the classroom would certainly vary. "Stop talking and get on with your work", is an expression heard in classrooms for older children. There would be wide variations even in a single school in the extent and circumstances in which dialogue between children would be regarded as part of the curriculum of early education. This would be reflected in the layout of the classroom, organisation of the day, perhaps also in the content and arrangements of wall displays, in the presence or absence of an area for role play as a focal point in the classroom. Most primary schools would regard achieving competence in the three 'Rs' as one of their goals for children. The extent to which oral language is seen both as a facilitator of instruction in these skills, and, as a basic skill to be developed in its own right, would vary not only between teachers of children of different ages but between teachers of a single age-group.

There is a final distinction which is perhaps valuable in identifying crucial differences between teachers in the selection of materials, organisation of classrooms and strategies in relating to the children in their classrooms. It is the distinction between the teachers who see themselves rather as counsellors and those who see themselves as instructors who have a body of knowledge which should be pre-arranged and as efficiently as possible passed to children as recipients. Clearly while this is a continuum, few teachers lie at either extreme. Furthermore, it is one which interacts with the aspects referred to already namely play/work, choice/direction, mobile/seated (this latter referring to teachers and children). Together these concepts do help to make sense of similarities and differences in classrooms as learning contexts. The concept of the teacher as a counsellor or instructor was used to effect by Southgate and Roberts (1970) in Reading: Which Approach? where they were considering ways to assist teachers in choosing between different types of beginning reading schemes. The teacher 'instructor' was, they felt, more likely to be satisfied with, and, to use as the originator intended, a systematic scheme with related supplementary books and detailed guidance on its appropriate use. The teacher 'counsellor' in contrast was more likely to favour and to use appropriately a scheme with ample choice and flexibility, with a variety of additional books from which children could choose to extend their experience, with a manual with ideas and suggestions rather than guidelines. The distinction was found particularly valuable in this present context in distinguishing between the various classrooms.

Classroom organisation

A diagrammatic sketch was made of each classroom showing the location of the furniture, the equipment, the place of the teacher's desk, height of display boards, siting if available of such items as a 'Wendy House', paints etc. A comparison was thus possible between the layout on the three visits and between different classes. Differences were apparent from a study of this aspect of the classroom between the teachers in the extent to which they perceived the children as initiators, and, the extent to which they anticipated or encouraged movement in the classroom. Such differences were reflected in the grouping of desks, the position of the teacher's desk, the position, height and content of the displays. There was evidence of differences between teachers within a school, and not only between schools, in the extent to which the layout of the classroom appeared to be planned to encourage children to initiate, to make choices, to be independent and to interact with each other. There were also differences in the extent to which the organisation appeared to cater for the teacher herself to be 'mobile' most of the time or whether more often the children were expected to approach her for assistance.

All the teachers in the study were experienced, committed teachers who nonetheless had characteristically different patterns of organisation of the rooms which appeared to be reflected also in other aspects of the classroom context. The displays in the classrooms were generally attractive and interesting. Here again, some were more 'static' reflecting a display of completed work or an attractive backcloth to the classroom, which when completed was likely to remain for some time. Others were 'dynamic' reflecting continued change with much of the display contributed by the children themselves. The multicultural nature of the children's backgrounds was reflected in a number of the displays both in the classrooms and elsewhere in the schools. Some schools or classrooms had their 'house styles' for printing on the displays, some had work by the children frequently displayed and labelled.

In some classrooms the materials for painting and for dressing-up were readily available and accessible by children themselves who were free at least at certain times to initiate such activities. In other classrooms more of the day was structured and such activities might be available only at certain times. The organisation of the classroom and favoured pattern of the teacher determined the extent to which children who were unable to continue with a set piece of work, would or could turn to some other activity until help was available.

Adults in the classroom

In addition to the class teacher there was at least one other adult available for part of the day in each of the classrooms. In some classrooms the presence of a nursery nurse or other helper was 'ad hoc' shared with other classes in the infant department. Here also there were variations in the ways in which the help by the assistants was planned and the extent to which the planning and the timetable was made known explicitly to the helpers. In one class, for example, the teacher displayed information on the range of activities to be covered in the week for the benefit of the other adults in the classroom. In one school there were young adults from different ethnic backgrounds who had been recruited under the Manpower Services Scheme and who were encouraged to talk with the children (where appropriate in their mother tongue). It is interesting to note that more than one young girl in that school as a result of this experience decided to train as a nursery nurse. There was little evidence in any of the classrooms of the involvement of parents in the classroom on a regular basis, although in some instances there were close links with Asian mothers who for example attended a class in the school, or assembly.

During the course of the year of observation in the research there was evidence of a great deal of community involvement in several of the schools and on one occasion a member of the research team attended such a function and even prepared a videotape of the occasion for the school.

Timetables

All seven teachers had general timetables indicating among other things the times of activities for which rooms had to be booked, of assembly etc. Some teachers had in addition more specific timetables indicating which skill or activity would be taught at a particular time of day. The general timetables reflected a somewhat similar emphasis on story, poetry, number, writing, with in some instances further detail of time for news or phonics for example. Even where there was not detailed timetabling the teachers were able to articulate what they were planning. Some of these timetables allowed for an element of choice so that in a particular session some children might be 'working' on language while others were working on numeracy, or engaged in creative activities: normally careful records were kept of precisely where each child had reached on a given aspect.

While the children were not asked this specifically it would appear from the differences in layout of the classrooms, pattern of the day and approach, that in some classrooms the children themselves would be more aware of the likely pattern of their day and of the element of choice they could make. In other classrooms, to the children at least, the days may have appeared less predictable, and more adult-directed. In some classrooms the timetabling was precise not only where influenced by external constraints but also with regard to the remainder of the school day. It should be noted that four of the classes observed, those in Schools 1 and 2, had children who were withdrawn for help in groups from the Ethnic Minority Services Support teachers. The arrangements for this varied in the two schools in ways which would affect the dynamics of the classrooms. Differences were apparent in, for example, the number of children withdrawn at a time, whether from a single class and for how long; all of these were factors of which the reception class teachers required to take account. They required to take note of the time of day to cover certain aspects should they wish all the children to participate, and, to ensure that there were activities available for the children on their return. While some of these difficulties are avoided where the additional assistance is in the classroom, this brings with it a number of other complications, particularly where the teaching approach of the two adults is very different. The contexts provided for the children in these group settings outside the classroom will be discussed later.

Teaching approach

Some aspects of the approach across a day and over the year have been indicated by implication in the previous sections of this chapter. Related to this was the type of activities offered, the extent of choice during any given period, the freedom of choice when finished a particular task, also the extent to which the children were encouraged and free to change activity and to interact with other children. In all the classrooms the teachers were effectively in control. The ways in which this was reflected in the classroom varied with, for example, differences between classrooms in the permitted noise level. With some teachers interactive talk was encouraged if not distracting to others: with other teachers this was less in evidence.

Communication in the classroom

Various aspects of the classroom as contexts for learning have been briefly noted. There appeared for a number of the aspects to be a relationship between the teacher's approach as 'instructor' or 'counsellor' and other aspects. In some of the classrooms the day was consciously teacher-directed and also perhaps more work orientated. The extent of the teacher's talk, to whom she talked, and about what, seemed influenced also by this general approach. How children would be grouped was also influenced by the teacher's perception of the role of the teacher. In one classroom, for example, some children for whom Punjabi was their mother tongue were grouped together and their talk together in their mother tongue encouraged even although it was not understood by the teacher herself.

The extent to which the teachers encouraged and facilitated dialogue between children and between children and adults varied. It seemed likely that this would be reflected in teacher judgment of the children's level of discourse skills. Sample items similar to those at the different levels on the PLAI test were devised and the teachers were asked to identify which children they thought would be able to answer specific questions. In this way it was possible to deduce the perceptions of the various teachers on the range of competence in their class. The results of this will be considered later.

Further aspects relevant to communication in the classrooms with adults were obtained by use of the radiomicrophones on target children. At a later stage an opportunity was given to the teachers to speak for a few minutes individually to each of a number of target children of different levels of language competence. Communication in classrooms will be discussed further in a later section on the basis of dialogue from a variety of contexts and of children of different levels of language competence. Consideration will there be given to the strengths and weaknesses of different classroom contexts and teaching strategies as contexts for children both to exhibit the skills which they do have and develop further competence.

There is a further aspect relevant to the reception classes which should perhaps be reported at this stage, namely the approaches adopted by the ethnic minorities support staff in the schools.

Ethnic minority support classrooms

Schools 1 and 2, the two large schools with many children in their reception classes for whom English was a second language had access to teachers from the Ethnic Minorities Support Service who were based in the school and who helped selected children on a withdrawal basis. In School 1, as noted earlier, it was possible to allocate a large classroom to two 'Support' teachers who worked together in that room with a group of about twelve children. For the first half of the morning they taught a group of children with very limited competence in English and for the second half of each morning a similar group of children also from the two reception classes but who had somewhat greater competence in English. The children attended each day and could, after review, be transferred from one group to the other, or returned full-time to the reception class. The EMSS teachers linked with the teacher in charge of the infant department and the reception class teachers. They also sent reports to the head of their own service and attended monthly meetings with other members of the service at their Centre which has a useful resource centre. The classroom reflected the multi-cultural background of the children as did the materials. A balance of activities was provided with the aim that the regular and 'withdrawal' teachers should consolidate each other's work. The EMSS teachers conversed normally with the children, then refined question demands and structured the language to assist the children in developing and exhibiting competence in English. This was supported by stories, concrete and creative activities and, for example, shopping expeditions. The curriculum and activities reflected joint management by two teachers with complementary background and interests. These two teachers would have appreciated the opportunity to have more time to talk with parents and to visit homes to set their work in that context also. A short video of a drama session of 'Three Little Pigs' was made in this setting and some samples of language were also collected.

In School 2 the full-time teacher from the EMSS worked within a similar framework of support. She however had only a small room in which to take the children withdrawn and chose to arrange her timetable in a more flexible way with short sessions with smaller groups of children of from 10-15 minutes (in contrast to one hour sessions and groups of twelve children in the other school). In this school only children of Asian ethnic origin were withdrawn. This teacher utilized the short periods with the children for intensive language work directed at helping their oral language competence backed by concrete materials based on systematic use of specific curriculum materials. The room was attractive and had a range of pictorial materials and multi-ethnic characters (for example, as stand-up figures and puppets). Because she was working on her own, this teacher had not the reciprocal support available to the others working in a team-teaching situation. Reception children were observed also in this classroom and clearly enjoyed the structured setting and the clear innovative approach which was used with the materials. Observation was not made of the children in the other withdrawal setting, who for much of the session were with a relief teacher.

CHAPTER 7

RECEPTION CLASSES AS CONTEXTS FOR LEARNING, SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE VIEWS OF THE TEACHERS

The reception classrooms in the five schools were considered in Chapter 6 as contexts for learning, based on observations, recordings and discussions with staff during 1982-83. Inevitably the framework within which this was reported carried with it interpretations of the aims and priorities of the teachers, at least by implication. Likewise there were assumptions about those features (material, organisational and human) which were facilitating or constraining their achievement. On reflection, it was felt that an important dimension would be added if the views of the teachers of these reception classes were sought on the topics reported so far, and before they had studied any of the report.

These interviews were a possibility because of the extension of the research into 1983-84 and became a reality because of the additional work undertaken by Miss Dewhirst who conducted all the interviews in the Spring Term 1984. Mrs. Anderson, a Priorsfield Fellow in the University of Birmingham, accompanied Miss Dewhirst and took over the teacher's present class during the interview, thus enabling the interviews to take place in a somewhat more leisurely atmosphere with the teachers freed temporarily from competing claims. An important feature was the fact that all the interviews were conducted by one person, and by someone already well known to the teachers and knowledgeable about early education. The careful planning of the topics to be covered, of the precise wording of the questions and the order of their presentation, made it possible to achieve a stimulating professional discussion yet still allowed comparisons to be made between the teachers with regard to their expressed priorities. The early questions tended to be more general and open-ended; those in the latter part of the interview, while on occasions dealing with related topics, were more specific and more 'closed' in nature. In this way it was possible to compare the priorities of the various teachers and to ensure that the views of all the teachers were available on the full range of topics, even where they were not spontaneously included in answers at the earlier more exploratory stages. Contexts within which the questions were to be introduced were included within the interview plan: the pace of the interviews was then varied as appropriate while allowing each interview to be completed within a single sitting.

The teachers who had taught the nine reception classes in the five schools in 1982-83 were all interviewed (all those whose classes had been observed and the two remaining teachers of the reception classes in School 2). The nine reception class teachers interviewed were as follows:

both teachers in School 1,

all four teachers in School 2 (two of whose classes had been observed)

the teacher of the reception class in each of Schools 3, 4 and 5 (the teacher in School 4 had joined the staff only in February 1983).

A parallel interview was conducted with the member of staff with responsibility for the infant department and associated nursery class in the two schools with more than one reception class (Schools 1 and 2). This enabled their co-ordinating role with regard to the reception classes to be discussed in addition to their views on other topics. In the schools where reception class children were also taught by members of the E.M.S.S. these staff were interviewed. Both such teachers were interviewed in School 1 and one of the teachers in School 2 (the other teacher had been on extended leave during much of 1982-83 and replaced by a supply teacher). All but two of the relevant teachers were still teaching in these same schools in 1983-84 - the reception class teacher in School 3 and the teacher with responsibility for the infant department in School 1 (in that same school the Headteacher had also changed by 1983-84). The two teachers who had left agreed to take part in the interviews.

The Structured Interviews

The interview questions are reported in full in the Appendix, thus enabling the reader to note the framework within which each topic was introduced, the order of the questions, the extent to which certain topics were introduced as more general issues at an early stage, followed later by related or more specific questions. The questions were directed throughout to the reception children in 1982-83 in order to ensure a focus in practice and at several points the teachers were asked to specify children with whom they felt they had succeeded or failed, or children who presented particular problems because of their limited language or advanced language. The teachers were, however, asked also to indicate ways in which they regarded that class as atypical, or they themselves would change their practice now with a similar class. The interviews with the reception class teachers which lasted from about 35 minutes to over an hour were tape-recorded for subsequent analysis. The main issues explored are noted below.

Aims and Priorities

Questions related to this were asked at various stages of the interview and at different levels of specificity. The first question in the interview concerned the teachers' priorities for the reception class, followed by questions concerning features which assisted this or constrained their achievement, and ways they might now have changed. Also related to this were questions on the range of skills the children brought with them, how they would build on these and whether there had been any children with specific needs. After some discussion on intake the teachers were asked what they aimed to achieve with most children during their time in reception class and this was then related to children who had or had not prior experience of preschool education.

After some further questions related to the relationship between preschool and reception classes the topic of aims was discussed further with specific reference to reading, writing and number (included were specific questions on, for example, the place of story-reading and copy-writing and productive writing). The purpose of a later question, seeking their views on the expectations of the children's next teacher, with regard to the children's progress in reading, writing and number, was partly in order to explore the extent to which the reception class teachers appeared to feel constrained in their own practice by what they regarded as expectations of the subsequent teachers. Oral language was mentioned specifically only towards the end of the interview at which point the teachers were asked their views on this, the extent of their responsibility, which children were perceived as having difficulties and the nature of these. They were also asked about children whose language was so advanced that they had difficulties catering for their needs. In view of the teachers' knowledge of the focus of the research they were aware of the interest of the research team in this area. By delaying specific questions on this until the end of the interview it did prove possible, however, to explore the relative importance of this aspect for the nine reception teachers in the study.

Pattern of Intake

Pattern of intake to the reception class was explored in relation to numbers, admission dates, and organisation of the reception class, with specific questions to the four teachers in School 2 in relation to family grouping - its advantages and disadvantages. There were specific questions on the teachers' preference for one or more than one intake: other questions related to range of skills on entry were at an early stage in the interview intended to assess not only the teachers' views on individual differences in ability in their classes but also in relation to age range on entry, prior experience of preschool education and its possible contribution.

Similarities and Differences

Similarities and differences between preschool education and the aims of the reception class were explored initially by noting the extent to which the teachers themselves drew distinctions among their class on this basis. This was followed (Q.15-17) with specific questions on similarities and differences between the aims, and whether those entering direct from home were seen as having different needs, and if so, what these were.

More specific questions of comparison between preschool and reception class were introduced later and in a neutral way by reference to recent research which has suggested that there are differences between the two stages in relation to a number of aspects. The aspects selected were those which were discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the observation in the classrooms. The research referred to (And so to School Cleave, Jowett and Bate, 1982) was not one with which the teachers were familiar. The topics discussed with the reception teachers were free-choice of activities, teacher and child mobility and the balance between play and work. The teachers were asked for their views, the balance in their classrooms and the reasons for that.

Children from Ethnic Minorities

Children from ethnic minorities were found present in all these reception classes but in different proportions. None of the early questions made any reference to such issues. As indicated already, however, there were questions on the range of skills the children brought, on constraints, on whether the same would have been expected of all children. The names of children who had particular difficulties or who were advanced in language were noted. It was thus possible to assess the kind of children whom the teachers regarded as having problems and also the nature of such problems. From this and the teachers' knowledge of the children in each class, it was possible to study the extent to which the staff were identifying specific groups of children disproportionately to their presence in their classes and for what reasons. At the end of the interview, questions were asked specifically related to children from ethnic minorities, whether any such children were seen to have problems, if so which children and the nature of the problems. It was thus possible to pinpoint any problems for those children as seen by their teachers and also whether they were related to language and /or social problems and in the classroom or the playground. Such children might well have been mentioned whether or not they had been from an ethnic minority background. This question, while asking the teachers if appropriate to identify specific children, also provided them with an opportunity to make more general points should they feel these were relevant.

Finally, the teachers were given an opportunity to raise any points not covered in the interview which they felt were important.

Responses to the Interviews by the Reception Class Teachers

Aims and Priorities

General priorities stated by most reception class teachers in answer to the initial question in the interview included settling the children into school - expressions, such as 'making the children feel secure', 'confident', 'having good attitudes to work', or 'happy and comfortable' were used. The importance of language was mentioned by several teachers in relation to getting the children prepared for the basic skills, or for reading or 'to develop the academic levels for which they are capable'. Two teachers stated as their two priorities socializing the children and developing their language. Several teachers referred to material aspects as assisting them in achieving their aims - such as a large classroom enabling the children to move around, or particular materials which gave a supportive structure. Several teachers mentioned human resources such as senior staff or a nursery nurse: one referred to the prevailing atmosphere in the school and the involvement of parents. The desire of the children to learn and the knowledge of the children from the nursery class were also mentioned by one teacher. Constraining features noted included differences between children who had come straight from home and those who had experienced preschool education. Differences in age were commented on by only one teacher who felt torn between the need for the younger children to play and the older ones 'to be extended' (this was one of the family-grouped classes with two age-groups). The need for more time from nursery nurses was mentioned by two teachers; problems of interruptions were also noted by two teachers - one caused by the adjoining classroom and outside toilet, the other by visitors (a problem for the teacher new to the school mid-session). One teacher referring to the children's limited concentration and skills as constraints commented later that she felt she had attempted to advance them too much: (this was her first year with a reception class). Another teacher referred to her own over-expectations as a constraint. She noted as something she would do differently that she would attempt to exercise more patience initially and spend more time settling the children - she had been 'guilty of trying to teach with a big T'.

The range of skills the children brought with them on entry varied widely according to several teachers, three teachers gave examples either of named children to illustrate this or of kinds of differences. The focus for some of the teachers in answering was the difference between those who had attended preschool and those who entered direct from home. The following question was, "How did you go about building on them?"
This was answered by four of the teachers in relation to the range of skills mentioned in the previous question, and they indicated ways in which they would identify the differences from records or talking with the children individually, how they would start from where each child was or how they would mix groups to include the more and less advanced. The other five teachers referred rather in their answers to the basis of entry skills of

the group, to teaching, materials, organisation or talking to the children as a group.

Reference has already been made in relation to constraints, to changes two teachers would have made and to their feeling that they had been too anxious to advance the children. A third teacher felt that she also had been 'too conscious of accelerating their skills' and 'didn't allow enough play'. She commented that the research had made her more aware of the children's levels. The teacher who had entered only mid-session would have continued to develop the pattern she had adopted from her predecessor 'keeping a careful watch and retaining the elements of mobility and freedom' yet keeping this structure. Another teacher who reported in the past having tried a variety of approaches (including having the children all doing the same thing at the same time) felt that the only way for her was 'to have an integrated day working closely with a small group'. The remaining four teachers did not feel they would make any major changes.

Aims for the reception year in relation to most children were discussed (Q.14) and while one teacher referred back to her answer to the first question, most teachers indicated again their desire that the children be settled, confident, willing to concentrate, listen, to be able to communicate, etc. They also noted their aims in relation to the basic skills hoping for a good start towards reading and number though one teacher qualified her comments with regard to the Easter intake. One teacher in addition noted her hope that the children would be 'ready to learn in a more structured way'.

The 'basic skills' were clearly seen as important by these reception class teachers. Most teachers introduced reading with the assistance of 'Breakthrough to Literacy' which they regarded as a valuable resource, referred to also in connection with productive-writing. Reference was made to phonics and flashcards by most teachers. Story reading to children did not tend to be mentioned in response to the initial question on resources for learning to read. One teacher said that she gave children a book straight away; another teacher commented that she had perhaps given the children a book earlier than was advisable. One teacher was unhappy with the reading scheme in use which she felt was not appropriate for her children. She was one of the two teachers who, in response to the initial question on reading, commented on the importance of books in the classroom which children look at and 'pretend to read'. Both of these teachers on the later question on the role of story reading to the children stressed its importance in giving children an interest in books which they are keen to read and look at pretending to read. Several other teachers in replying noted an important role for story reading in relation to developing an interest in reading, others commented on its value as a stimulus to the imagination, to oral language development, to listening or saw it as 'enjoyable' or a relaxed end to the day.

Resources for teaching reading tended to be regarded as adequate. One teacher referred to the need for more time to hear children read, another to the need for more adult help. This teacher who had commented on the importance of story reading, commented that she did on occasion have two parents come in to help, found this valuable and would wish to extend it. She also commented that the children are so young that you can only work with two or three at a time (age range was 4+ to 5+). Some children she felt were ready to read immediately on entry and she named several such children. The other teacher who had stressed the function of story reading as a resource in reading said that she tried to work with the children individually. She commented on problems in this connection with the Easter intake.

A comparable question on writing to the initial question on reading was,
"What do you see as the early stages of writing?"
The responses indicated that these teachers interpreted this in terms of handwriting to which they gave high priority. Their responses referred to tracing and copying, to pattern-making, to holding a pencil, to the need for a lot of practice and to ensure that the children do not develop bad habits. Only one teacher referred to use of 'Breakthrough' in response to this question. One teacher referred to pressure from home, another teacher commented that some children found handwriting difficult but are not excluded from the class lesson. There were not references to the wide age ranges within some classes or to the much younger children in some reception classes. Apart from the one reference to 'Breakthrough' noted above, reference was not made to productive-writing or the functions of writing until this was specifically asked in the following question in response to which reference was made to 'Breakthrough' as a resource, or to children dictating stories, or captions for pictures. This focus

on transcription at this early stage does not appear to be an artefact of the questions as it was reflected in the observations and in the samples of children's writing collected during the study. The problems in meeting the needs of so many children with regard for example to dictated stories was explicitly commented on by one teacher.

In answer to the question on number work most teachers made reference to 'Nuffield Mathematics' and specific mention was made of matching, sorting, correspondence and practical activities. One teacher commented on problems of children who come to school able to count in a rote manner, another teacher remarked on the pressures from home 'to do sums'.

In answer to the questions on the expectations of the receiving teacher in the next class with regard to the basic subjects, most teachers either referred back to their earlier replies or repeated the essence of these. None made any reference to specific pressures from the next teacher which had been an important constraint on their aims. One teacher was herself the 'next' teacher for these children.

Oral language was the focus for a number of questions towards the end of the interview in relation to its importance, the needs of specific children and the extent of the reception class teacher's responsibility. As was noted earlier, two teachers had given oral language development as an important priority in their answer to the initial general question on aims. The teachers all indicated their acceptance of the importance of oral language. In answer to the specific questions however, they stressed rather different aspects. One teacher emphasised the dependence of all the other skills and concepts on this, another stressed that it usually comes before print. Some teachers stressed the lack of ability on entry of some children to speak in sentences or that they used one word utterances or 'labelled'. Their poor recall, limitations in descriptive language, the needs of second language learners were all mentioned. Stress was also laid on the fact that limited language was not confined to second language learners. One teacher stressed the need for the children to learn to listen and for a good working atmosphere in the classroom which she felt could be disturbed by discussion. The children were encouraged to tell her things. In contrast, another teacher stressed the importance of the children being part of a group to express themselves and the value of small group sessions around a stimulus, which she held regularly to stimulate oral language development. Another teacher said she needed to be aware of children who did not make contact and to put them in situations where they would have to make contact.

All the teachers emphatically agreed that it was their responsibility to help overcome these difficulties in oral language - some replied 'totally' or '100 per cent' or 'it's part of my job' or 'I get paid to do just that'. 'It is my main responsibility' and 'it is part of my daily routine' were other responses to this. indicating a strong commitment though not necessarily sole responsibility. One teacher expressed the wish that she had help with the second language learners (of which there were a few in her classroom). No teacher referred to the responsibility for oral language development being shared with an EMSS Teacher in spite of the fact that six of the nine teachers interviewed had such support. From the observations during the research and the interviews with these teachers, it was clear that stimulating oral language development was their major priority. Either the extent of their contribution was forgotten during the interview - or was not fully appreciated. No reference was made to the support of these teachers in responding to the question on children whose language was so limited that it made it difficult for them to function in school: nor was it made in earlier discussion of children who were 'your greatest successes' where it is possible that some of these children's advances could have been the result of the dialogue in small group situations stimulated by the EMSS teacher. It is perhaps worth noting and equally surprising that no reference was made under 'constraints' to the withdrawal on a regular basis of a number of children from the classroom, which it must be assumed would have had some organisational implications within the classroom. These points will be further discussed in relation to the interviews of the EMSS teachers. Most of the teachers named several children whose language they felt was so advanced that there were problems catering for their needs within the classroom. Most of these were among the children who had scored impressively high on the language test administered during the research. Some children from each ethnic background were named. The teachers did not suggest a sharing of the responsibility for the children's oral language development with the parents where children had difficulties.

Pattern of Intake

Pattern of intake was different in the schools, two schools had one intake and three had three intakes. In one of the former schools there was family grouping. It is thus more appropriate to discuss responses to this question in relation to the organisation of the reception class in question. All six teachers who had taught reception classes with one intake expressed a preference for that organisation as they felt the children were 'settled at once'. One of these teachers, while expressing a preference for this arrangement, would have liked to see the admissions spread over a month. The three teachers who had experienced three intakes were not happy about the arrangement. This was, however, partly a reflection of the size of the group and resultant mobility within the school. As may be seen from the comments

"you get to know the children just as they move up"
"awkward, especially with the Easter intake - they should really have stayed with me another term"
"the summer intake always seems to lose out".

The relative strengths and weaknesses of family grouping noted by the four teachers whose classes were so organised related to the assistance in settling the younger children, that the older children have responsibility and the younger ones can be extended, and that mature older ones introduce the younger ones to school. Not all had experience of any other system. One of these teachers would have preferred a single age-group as she felt there was a tendency to demand too much of the reception class children, who were expected to be quiet so that the older children could concentrate, which prevented the greater mobility she would have preferred. She also felt story times were difficult. The two other teachers with a single age-group would not have favoured family grouping. One of the remaining teachers reported she had seen it work well, another felt it might have helped the children become a settled group (in spite of the three intakes), the third teacher commented adversely on her experience which had involved a one term intake of a few children and some older slow learners.

Similarities and Differences

Similarities and differences between preschool education and the aims of the reception class were explored in a series of questions (15-26). Note was also taken of any references by the teachers to the children's preschool experiences. In general the responses of these reception class teachers indicated that they regarded preschool education as socialising the children and teaching them to play. One teacher commented that at the beginning of the year there would be little difference in their aims. A high proportion of the children in these reception classes had attended preschool education and in seven of the nine classes most had attended a unit which was part of that school. It is thus particularly surprising how little knowledge these teachers had of the aims of nursery education and its relationship to the aims of the reception class; furthermore how few had visited a nursery school or class which their children had attended to see first hand what range of activities was offered and the aims of these. Reference was made in the previous chapter to issues explored in the research And so to School (Cleave, Jowett and Bate, 1982) in which the structure of the day for children immediately before and after transfer to the reception class was observed. The observations reported in the current research and discussed in Chapter 6 were comparable to the views expressed by the teachers at interview and although none of the teachers had read the research referred to above their views were similar to those findings. Most teachers referred to a need for structure, several indicating that mornings were structured for basic skills and afternoons freer for art and craft etc. One teacher referred to an integrated day as her organisation which meant that choice came as appropriate. The teachers tended to express a preference for the children to sit and concentrate, and that it is important that they do not 'drift'. The need for more adult help to be available for mobility to be possible and constructive was stressed by several teachers (which one teacher noted is available in the nursery class). The teachers' responses to the issue of work/play were anticipated by some in their answers to the initial question where they referred to preschool education in terms of play. Two teachers specifically referred to the reception class in contrast as 'getting down to work'. An interesting range of comments were made to the later statement on which they were asked to comment that research had shown that the label used by the teachers in the nursery setting was more often 'play' while in reception classes it was 'work' (Q.26). The following are some of the comments:

"they can play when they have done their work"

"play is still important, but I like them to get down to work"

"structured play activities would be called work"
"play can be work disguised"
"if at the play stage they play and learn"
"work is a teacher definition rather than a child's definition - they think it is a game"
"my main approach is through play; the children seem to use the word work more than the teacher - to them pencil and paper means work!"

Thus while there were individual differences in the views of these teachers they did tend to favour the views expressed in the research referred to above. Furthermore their views at interview did in general accord with the practice observed in the classrooms.

Children from ethnic minorities

It was already known to the schools that this was a particular focus of this research. No reference was made to this by the interviewer until almost the end of the interview, thus making it possible to note any spontaneous references. The question asked was the following:

> "Do you feel that any of the children had particular difficulties in school because of their ethnic background? Who? Language difficulties or problems in other areas, e.g. the playground - what kinds of problems?"

On studying the transcripts of earlier parts of the interviews it was clear that these teachers made few generalisations about children in terms of ethnic background. Occasional comments were made concerning problems for children for whom English was a second language and two teachers made specific reference to the isolation of a particular child including in the playground - because no other child spoke the same language. Even where in discussion on oral language reference was made to problems of second language learners teachers tended to add that there were other children with difficulties and of limited competence also. When names were sought of children who were seen as advanced or successes these included children from different ethnic backgrounds. The children whom the teachers felt had continued difficulties or with whom they had failed were also from a variety of backgrounds and specific information, physical or environmental, about the nature of their problems were given by the teachers. There was an occasional reference to children having been taught to count rather than a concept of number or to print capitals or to lack of experience of play. There were virtually no references to children of West Indian/Afro-Caribbean origin - any references were to specific children perceived as advanced or with difficulties. The response of these teachers to the specific issue of ethnic origin is best summed up in the answer of one teacher which reflected the views of these reception class teachers.

> "Generally it is the environmental background that causes difficulties and not the ethnic background. They seem integrated as a community and they play well together."

This perception of these children and their teachers was confirmed by our observations in the classroom and in the playground.

At the end of the interview the teachers were asked if they had any other points and what as professionals they saw as major points. The teachers did not tend to raise any additional points. Several stressed the need for more help and for more adults in these classrooms to increase interaction with adults for the children, that they do not have enough time for the needs of these children of which they were so clearly aware. One teacher expressed the hope that the teachers could get together and compare their aims while another expressed the hope that we would publish something about the research for teachers as they need something to help them.

Promoted staff in two schools: their co-ordinating role

Two of the schools in the research have more than one reception class, and each has a nursery class attended by many of the children part-time for a year before entry to the reception class. The views were sought of the promoted member of staff in each of these schools with responsibility for the infant department and nursery class. The focus of the interviews was their co-ordinating role with regard to the reception classes: most questions parallel those asked of the reception class teachers.

In many ways the aims of these two staff were similar. This was evident in the high priority accorded by each to oral language development in answer to the initial question on aims. Each stressed her role as a facilitator of this in terms of information and resources. They also referred to the value of the ethnic support staff and the presence of nursery nurses: each emphasised the need for human as well as material resources to enable work in small groups to take place. Their answers to the questions on the basic skills indicated further the importance they saw for oral language as a basis for these skills. References were made to looking at books, to talking about pictures and the need to move to reading through a variety of experiences with books. Story reading they saw as having a central role, preferably as an interactive experience in small groups, which should take place frequently, introducing children to a wide range of literature. The need to consider the purpose in writing as well as the mechanical aspects was stressed, for children to be helped individually, to talk with an adult who acts as scribe and to see what writing looks like. The language of number, shopping and practical mathematics were also mentioned.

One of these teachers noted among constraints in the year under discussion the fact that she had herself been teaching a class and also that one of the ethnic support staff had been absent on leave for much of the year. The views expressed by these staff did not indicate that targets in the basic skills were set for the reception class which would have pressurised teachers into premature introduction of 'formal' work. Indeed one of these staff referred to the importance of considering aims over the span of the infant department. In response to the later question specially on oral language these staff referred further to its 'vital' role which needed to be kept in the 'foreground': they also stressed the difficulties in putting such an ideal into practice.

Concern was expressed at the number of children who did not know how to question and in some situations a lack of 'oral inquisitiveness', not only among second language learners. Both staff commented on specific children whose language was advanced including children from different ethnic backgrounds. Likewise they named children with language difficulties, indicating the nature of their problems; they also were from differing ethnic backgrounds. Specific reference was made by one of the teachers to her fear that some children may be underestimated who are second language learners and that as a result they may be given activities which do not match their abilities.

These two promoted staff were of course familiar with the practice of preschool education and in expressing similarities and differences between preschool education and the reception class they would themselves have observed children making the transition. They were also taking into account the numbers of adults in the different settings and the views of the teachers who would have the responsibility of determining the balance in their own classrooms. They commented on the more leisurely pace possible in the nursery class with greater allowance for immaturities. Both staff mentioned that they saw the transition as a move towards more 'structure' but would still hope for mobility and choice within the structure; they also felt the children were becoming capable of more group work rather than the more individualised attention in the preschool setting. The differences between children from home, of which there were only a limited number, and those from nursery class were, they felt, evident in regard to socialising, particularly in the first few weeks, but the extent of any difference in language depended on the home environment.

Their knowledge of the children who had attended the nursery class was an important element in determining their allocation of the children to particular reception classes. They tried to ensure a mix which would enable the children to settle happily, including in this consideration friendship from the nursery class. Where they felt this important they placed children of the same ethnic background together and where there were few children with a particular mother tongue, they would avoid separating such children. The classes were planned so that each as far as possible had a comparable range of abilities.

Both staff favoured a single entry date partly because of their concern that children entering later might suffer, also to keep friends together. They differed, however, in their views on family grouping to which one was committed although she commented that she would have considered changing the organisation had she felt the staff were unhappy with it. She saw as its advantages that children coming in find an established pattern and other children help them, also there is more flexibility possible for the advanced younger children and slower middle infants. The other teacher was more concerned that such an organisation would impose an extra burden on the teachers of catering for a wider age range in a social priority area where there were already so many pressures in terms of language development and emotional problems.

Both staff showed a concern for the wide range of children in their care, were articulate in their aims, sensitive to the difficulties in translating these into practice and aware that they could not impose their views on the staff for whom they were responsible. To quote:

> "You often feel you would like to achieve more - there is a lot more to be done for ALL the children."

The importance of ensuring that the staff feel that this work is worthwhile was the final point stressed - that they do not feel the need to 'produce'.

Ethnic minority support staff: their views

The two schools referred to in the previous section had high proportions of children for whom English was a second language. Each had teachers from the EMSS based in the school helping on a withdrawal basis with children from the reception classes. The settings these teachers provided and the similarities and differences in these have already been reported in Chapter 6. Three of these teachers were interviewed, the two teachers in School 1 who worked with small groups in a team-teaching setting, and one of the teachers from School 2.

Each of the teachers in School 1 stated her aims in terms of helping the children's self-image, helping the children to acquire a 'survival' language and linking between home and school: neither saw it as her function to teach the children to read and write. In achieving these aims they 'structured' play situations which would facilitate conversation, and where the children were relaxed and willing to communicate. Neither teacher would differentiate 'work' and 'play'. Most of their situations are play - 'play is work'. They stressed that role playing, arts and crafts, and outside visits were all initiated to help develop communication in everyday situations. Both felt that the children who had attended nursery class did not need as much of their support while some who came from home were lacking in confidence, bewildered and nervous. Some children needed help in socialising. They commented on the value both socially and culturally of the two 'Youth Opportunities Project' students who were Punjabi speakers (both had subsequently entered nursery nurse training). These teachers stressed that their function is different from that of the nursery class - 'time is short but the children must have freedom to chat'. They felt that most children had made progress over the year and some were commented upon particularly. One child it was reported had come alive when taken out. Some who had not yet made sufficient progress linguistically they felt had still benefitted socially and were more confident. It was commented that they begin to 'query it' if in these settings the children do not begin to pick up English soon. It should be stressed that these two teachers were interviewed separately and thus the comparability of the views expressed was not an effect of the interview.

The other EMSS teacher interviewed also stressed language development as her aim, emphasising the importance for the achievement of this of a room of her own where the context can be set and the quiet or diffident child can be encouraged. Among the constraints noted were the absence of the other teacher and the problems of frequent absence of some of the very children who needed help most (several children were named). Long absence because of visits to India had also affected the progress of some of the children who had taken a considerable time to settle back into school on their return. The range of skills in the children on entry was reported to be from virtually no English to a high level of competence. Several successes were named and even where there had not as yet been much progress the child was thought to be on 'the verge of a breakthrough'. This teacher made a similar comment to the others that the children who had been in nursery class settled more quickly and that some of those who came direct from home needed to be helped to mix and to play. Like these two teachers she also stressed the need for 'structure' in this setting with occasional choice, and she also stressed that she taught through play and that the children regarded it as play. She also stressed that one child at least who was making slow progress appeared not to be coping in the mother tongue and was observed not to speak to Punjabi-speaking peers.

In short, the focus for all three teachers was to stimulate the children's oral language development although the approach was not identical: their aims were to encourage as much dialogue between the children as possible and each planned and structured the short periods for which they had the groups of children to that end.

In Part II the information on the language development of the children will be considered in more detail, initially on the basis of the assessments undertaken by the research team in English and Punjabi. This will be followed by a more detailed study of the language of some of the children in a variety of settings.

PART II

THE LANGUAGE ABILITIES OF CHILDREN IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS

CHAPTER 8

CONTEXTS IN WHICH LANGUAGE SAMPLES WERE OBSERVED

Speaking and listening are language skills which all children over three years of age already possess in varying degrees of competence. It is important to distinguish their receptive language from their expressive language when assessing their levels of competence. There has been a tendency to assume that children who say little understand little, and perhaps also to assume that all they say is all that they can say. Recently there has been increasing emphasis in studies of children's language on the importance of the situation and the listener in influencing the extent of language elicited from children, and its complexity. Evidence of these influences will be discussed in later sections of this report. It is important also to consider significant aspects of the teacher's language and ways in which this may influence a child's understanding and ability to respond successfully to the demands of the classroom. Important features of teaching strategy which influence the classroom involvement possible for many of the children, as well as their understanding, are the vocabulary used by teachers, the extent to which this is modified appropriately when addressing individual children, and the type of questioning adopted.

If an assessment is made of a child's expressive language unrelated either to the demands of the context, or to the dialogue constraints imposed by participants, it is easy to overestimate the ability of the child to deal with the demands of the language of the classroom. It is possible, however, to assess more analytically a child's ability to respond to different levels of questioning which might be met in a classroom setting. In some instances very simple questions may be embedded in highly complex language, in others cognitively demanding questions may be couched in deceptively simple sentences. An appreciation of the nature and complexity of questions to which a child is able to respond appropriately is an important insight for teachers. It is particularly helpful if questions of different levels can be devised for the assessment in such a way that some of those which are cognitively demanding can be appropriately answered merely by pointing or by single word answers. Thus it is possible to separate receptive from expressive skills in ways that are meaningful in terms of classroom dialogue. Another valuable insight is gained by noting the way a particular child responds on being faced with questioning which is too complex - by silence, by replying 'I don't know', by a guess or by a useful strategy for distracting the adult's attention from the failure - such as by an interesting but irrelevant piece of information. This is a tactic used by some young children to cover a failure to understand - and by some adults also.

Since so much of the communication in classrooms is teacher-directed, and much of that is in the form of questions, it seemed valuable to have some information, not so much of children's vocabulary or sentence structure, but rather of their ability to cope with questions of different levels of complexity and abstraction, together with an analysis of the form of their response to questions to which they are unable to respond adequately.

As part of this research language was assessed on a standardised test, language samples were also obtained in a variety of settings for target children of different levels of competence and of various ethnic backgrounds. For a number of children who attended nursery school or class a sample of their language at free play in that setting was obtained. Such samples were collected in three nursery schools and two nursery classes and for a total of 25 children who subsequently entered one or other of the five primary schools in the research. These target children were chosen after consulting their teachers with the aim of identifying possible target children for further study of a range of language competence from different ethnic backgrounds. Where possible further samples of language of these children were collected in free play situations in the classroom and playground. Additional target children were added who had entered reception class direct from home. In addition to these samples in 'natural' settings with other children a 'contrived' setting was arranged whereby the reception class teacher (on whom on this occasion the radiomicrophone was placed) was asked to talk in turn with each of a number of selected children for a few minutes in the classroom, on a topic and in such a way as to enable each child to show his or her language competence. A further 'contrived' encounter within which language was recorded for 44 of the children in groups of four was one where each group was encouraged to discuss and play with a number of interesting objects on a tray in front of them. Initially the children talked among themselves, then an adult joined them and finally they were asked to write about the objects and the discussion about this request was also recorded. In each group there were children of different levels of language (as assessed on PLAI) and of different ethnic backgrounds.

As was reported in Chapter 4, 215 of the total intake of 247 children to these five schools were assessed on PLAI in English. Subsequently most of the children whose mother tongue was Punjabi were assessed in that language also. The remaining assessment of the children's language was by their teachers who were asked to judge the relative ability of each child in the class to respond to sample questions representing each of the four levels of difficulty in the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument.

In this second part of the report the evidence from these language samples and assessments will be discussed. Selected case studies of children of different levels of competence and from different ethnic background will also be presented illustrative of the high level of discourse skills of some of the children in a variety of settings, the differential effects of the setting on the apparent level of competence of others and finally the severity of the problems of some of the children. Lessons will then be drawn from this evidence and some suggestions made for assisting the language development of those with communication difficulties and also for stimulating the language development of the more able.

CHAPTER 9

ASSESSMENT BY THE TEACHERS OF THE CHILDREN'S COMPETENCE IN ANSWERING QUESTIONS

The assessment of the children's relative competence in answering questions of different levels of complexity and perceptual distance based on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (PLAI) administered in English was discussed in Chapter 4. There was evidence of a wide range of abilities on the test whatever the children's ethnic origin or mother tongue; furthermore as was noted in Chapter 5 there were wide differences within a single reception class and single intake. The above information was based on assessment by one of the research workers, in a test situation, and near to the time of the children's entry into school. It seemed valuable also to obtain some idea of their teacher's judgement of the children's relative competence in such tasks since it was likely that the teacher's classroom practice in general and in relation to individual children might well be influenced by such judgements. The teachers were asked to make these assessments after the children had been in their class for about a term and they had therefore had some opportunity to observe them in a number of settings during the course of the normal day-to-day activities. To make any such judgements of language comparable across teachers and across children a number of precautions are necessary (see Lomax in Clark and Cheyne, 1979). It is important to avoid a 'halo effect', in other words that what are intended to be independent assessments of a given child are each influenced by the person's general view of the child. Secondly, it is important to provide specific examples about which the judgements are to be made, otherwise the questions asked may be differently interpreted by the various respondents with the danger that different answers are given by respondents who yet 'mean' the same thing but who interpreted the questions differently. Likewise two respondents may give the same answer intending to make a different judgement. To avoid such pitfalls the teachers were asked to judge for each child in turn whether he or she would respond correctly to a number of specific items each of which was in turn displayed in front of the teacher.

Method of Assessment

The aim in this assessment was to select items which were equivalent to questions at the four levels in the assessment already carried out on PLAI. What appeared to be typical items were selected and placed on cards which were shown to the teacher. These were as follows:-

Card A This had a picture of a chair with the following two questions -

What is it called? (This would be Level 1)
What do we do with it? (This would be Level 2)

Card B This had pictures of a number of objects - a toothbrush, watch, sheep, orange, cat, clock and dog.

The instruction typed below was

Point to all the things that are not animals
(This would be Level 3)

Card C The following was on this card -

Why do we need umbrellas?
A boy has fallen off his bike. Why is he crying?
(These would be Level 4)

Arrangements were made to interview each reception class teacher away from the class. The research worker had a class list in alphabetic order (with the names of boys and girls interspersed). For the first question on Card A (which most children were likely to answer) the teacher was asked, as the name of each child in turn was read, to indicate any child she thought would not be able to respond to the question. This was then repeated for the second question in a similar manner. The research worker placed a cross opposite the name of any child whom the teacher did not expect to answer that question. The teacher did not see the responses and was therefore more likely to consider each child in relation to the others, and not one child in relation to the series of questions, with the danger of a 'halo effect'. A change in procedure was adopted for the remaining two cards where the items were more difficult, also to avoid a 'response set'. As each name was read the teacher was asked for Card B to indicate if she thought the child could correctly respond to that instruction. If so, the research workers placed a 'tick' opposite the name in the appropriate column. This was then repeated for each child with the questions on the final card. Where consistency was recorded for a child either as not being able to respond to any items, or as being able to respond to all, this procedure means that greater faith can be placed in this as based on independent judgements for questions at each level of difficulty.

This aspect of the study was only undertaken with the teachers whose classes were also in the observational study, that is for the children in seven of the nine reception classes. As one of the reception classes had a change of teacher mid-session eight teachers, not seven were involved in these assessments. In the four reception classes in the schools with one intake the whole of the reception class was judged in relation to each other at a single point in time, towards the end of the first term. In the remaining three schools with three intakes a visit was necessary for each intake and the children were judged in relation to the others admitted on the same entry date. Thus in the school with a change of teacher the first intake was assessed by one teacher, and the two remaining intakes by the other. Of the 247 children who entered the reception classes in these five schools 215 were in the seven classes involved in this aspect of the study. Most of the children who remained were assessed (except those who left shortly after admission) - 193 of the total intake of 215 children. The results on PLAI were available for most of these children. Before making a comparison for the groups, or for individual children, between the two assessments, validity of the test against the teachers' responses. The assessment of the children on PLAI was in a test situation, with a relative stranger, about the time of entry to school and on a range of questions at each level. The teachers were asked to judge each child's likely response to one sample question at each level, after the child had been in school for about a term and with knowledge of the child from the class/group situation. Some comparisons are, however, of relevance particularly since, for target children of different levels of competence, there are samples of language in a variety of settings preschool and during their time in the reception class to which these can be related.

The extent to which the judgements of individual teachers on their classes matched the results on PLAI varied. Some who expected most children to succeed had only a few children who performed thus on the test, while another teacher who expected few to cope with the examples had in her class a high proportion who were relatively successful on the test. Some teachers made little discrimination between the children (expecting the odd child to fail but the rest to be relatively similar). One teacher's judgements were relatively comparable with those found on PLAI. Attention was paid particularly to instances where individual children who were predicted as unable to respond correctly had scored high on testing. There were also children who scored low on the test but whose teachers estimated them as likely to succeed on all the sample items. For most teachers while there were differences in the proportion of children regarded as more or less competent as compared with the test, there were not gross discrepancies between the prediction and test results. For a few children, however, there were such discrepancies: some of these are among target children of different levels of competence for whom there are samples of their language in a variety of settings, pre-school and in the reception class.

In summary there was evidence from this assessment that most of the teachers did regard the sample questions at Levels 1, 2 and 3 as of increasing difficulty for some of their children, but did not discriminate between demands of the sample questions of Levels 3 and 4. In general they estimated that more children would succeed on these items than was found on the questions in the test situation. There were differences between the teachers in the proportion of their class they expected to succeed on all the questions: such differences did not always accord with the proportions found on the test. Finally, there were only a few instances of wide discrepancies either of children performing outstandingly on the test, whom the teacher estimated would have limited success or of children whom the teacher did not anticipate would have difficulty with such questions, who failed to respond under test conditions. It will now be possible to explore further with the evidence of the language of the target children the extent to which the test results were indeed borne out in other settings, and might therefore be regarded as valuable diagnostic information for certain children on entry to school. It will also be possible to consider whether the type of questions represented at Level 3 and particularly at Level 4 do present difficulties in a range of settings for many of these children and if so whether these difficulties in understanding the significance of, for example, 'why' questions do pose problems of educational significance: in short, whether there is evidence that teachers in the process of instructing ask children of this age questions which have 'hidden complexities' which result in misunderstanding and confusion for some children. Should this be so, it is pertinent then to consider whether this framework for analysis of the complexity level of questions is indeed helpful. Furthermore whether having diagnosed the level of competence of children it is possible to frame questioning in such a way as to moderate the demands as appropriate and assist children in developing the ability to grasp the significance of increasingly complex discourse.

Before turning to a discussion of the evidence from other settings of the children's ability to initiate and to respond to the demands of discourse there is one further aspect of language assessent which should be reported. That is the assessment on PLAI in Punjabi of the children for whom that is their mother tongue. A comparison of the scores on PLAI in Punjabi with the children's earlier performance in English provides valuable insights on the extent to which particular children do have the ability to respond appropriately to the demands of questions of differing levels of complexity. This information has relevance to decisions about the nature of assistance they may require, should they show difficulties in understanding and responding to the language in the classroom. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 10

A COMPARISON OF THE LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN TESTED IN PUNJABI AND IN ENGLISH

It was noted in Chapter 4, Table 4.3 that when tested on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (PLAI) in English shortly after entry to school a large proportion of the children of Asian origin, for whom English was not their mother tongue scored low or very low. This was somewhat confounded by the fact that they were mainly in the two schools with a single entry date which thus included a number of children who were very young. Even within these two schools, however, the picture is similar with twelve children of Asian origin scoring F (the lowest score) and no children of any other ethnic group scoring as low, and a further sixteen scoring E with only five in that category in the other groups (which combined were comparable in size). Level D still represents limited competence in discourse skills (strong or moderately strong at Level 1 questions only) and even there twice as many Asians featured as the other groups combined. Most of these children of Asian ethnic origin, of whom there are many in these classes, do not yet on the evidence of this testing appear to be able to respond to questions which are within the competence of most of their classmates. It should be noted that most of these children were born in this country and that most of the children have already had experience of part-time nursery education although for a maximum of a year only within the school they now attend. There appears, however, in as far as the test results are confirmed by other evidence, to be a lag at this stage between them and many of their classmates for whom English is their mother tongue, in responses to such questions in English. They may well quickly bridge that gap and furthermore they may already possess these skills in their mother tongue. There is, however, the possibility that some are no more competent in these discourse skills, or even less so, in their mother tongue.

As Punjabi is the mother tongue for the majority of the children of Asian origin in this sample it was decided to prepare a translation into Punjabi of PLAI and to administer this to these children at a later stage. The tranalation was undertaken by Mrs. Heleama Whittaker whose mother tongue is Punjabi and who was already competent in administration of the test in English. She also was a Master's level student of the Project Director and had studied language assessment within the course. Any problems in translating the test were discussed with Dr. Marion Blank who was a consultant on the project. Some of the problems of translation of PLAI had already been resolved as a Spanish version has been developed in the States. No major difficulties in preparing a Punjabi version were encountered as the aim is to assess whether in general a child can cope with a range of questions at a given level rather than to obtain precise scores. One item involving sentence completion was changed for the Punjabi translation because of difference in word order in the construction of sentences in Punjabi, which would have made a direct translation inappropriate. Details of the translation and a discussion of issues in such assessment will be reported elsewhere.

Mrs. Whittaker is also able to converse in Urdu and to identify Hindi, Gujerati and the Mirpuri dialect. She was at the time of the research a member of the Ethnic Minorities Support Service in Sandwell and was released a half day per week for part of the year to undertake the testing in which she was assisted by another Punjabi speaker. In order to encourage the children to accept Punjabi, and to respond in Punjabi when answering, the two testers presented themselves to the children as Punjabi speakers who did not speak English. By informal discussion with the children prior to testing an attempt was made to ensure that the children would be as relaxed as possible.

The total number of children of Asian origin who entered the reception classes in the two Sandwell schools in 1982-3 was 67, of whom 57 were assessed on PLAI in English. Only one child was absent and not tested, the rest either entered mid-session or left before they could be tested. Eight further children left between the time of assessment in English and the further testing, three for India. The scores in English of those three were E, D and C. The scores of the other five children who left were 3F, 1E and 1C. Particular attention is drawn to these five children who had already changed school so early in their first year and with apparently very limited competence in English. Their problems are a matter of concern since they would have to adjust to new playmates as well as a new setting, approach and adults. The full extent of the problems in providing early education appropriate to the needs of all children will not be appreciated unless account is taken of such children and the problems they may have and pose for the teachers.

In the Birmingham schools 13 of 16 children of Asian ethnic origin had been assessed in English, two of these left before they could be interviewed. Nine of the remaining 11 children were seen by Mrs. Whittaker but in no case was Punjabi found to be their mother tongue. She was able to identify the mother tongue of six of the children as Urdu, for two it was Gujerati, while the remaining child spoke only English, although it was confirmed that an older sibling spoke Urdu. The two remaining children of Asian origin in the Birmingham schools were not seen by Mrs. Whittaker, both scored high in the test in English (A and C respectively) one was known to speak only English.

In the two Sandwell schools Punjabi was the mother tongue for most children of Asian origin. In one of the schools Urdu was recorded as the mother tongue for eight of the children, most of whom scored very low on the PLAI in English. None of these children was, however, found to be speaking Urdu but instead a dialect used in the Mirpuri area of Pakistan. The Mirpuri dialect does not appear in written form so the parents if literate would use Urdu as the written language, which may have been an explanation for Urdu being given as the mother tongue. Such families are relatively recent arrivals to this particular district. The finding with regard to the children in that school are in contrast to the six children in the Birmingham schools in the study for whom Urdu was recorded as mother tongue who were indeed found to speak and understand Urdu.

Assessment in PLAI in Punjabi

Two of the children tested in English whose mother tongue was Punjabi were not assessed, but the remaining 41 of the 51 children of Asian ethnic origin in the Sandwell schools who had been assessed in English were tested on the Punjabi translation of PLAI. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the results of this assessment.

Every attempt was made to reassure and relax the children prior to testing and to establish that it was acceptable and expected that they respond in Punjabi. They were credited with verbal responses only where they were correct in Punjabi since they had already been assessed in English. It was likely for a variety of reasons that many of the children would score higher on this occasion: this was a repeat testing, using the same illustrative materials, the children were now several months older, they were assessed by teachers of the same ethnic origin, they were no doubt more familiar with the classroom setting also. It was, however, still thought to be valuable to obtain this additional information on the relative ability of the children to respond in their mother tongue. The children's age range on testing was about 4 years 6 months to 5 years 6 months and they had spent at least a term in the reception class. As may be seen from Table 10.1 there were children who scored either high or low on PLAI both in English and Pubjabi. There were some children who scored high in English and who were unable, or unwilling, to respond in Punjabi. In general, however, the lowest scoring children did improve their scores on this occasion. It was not possible from this testing alone, however, to determine the extent to which this was the result of an assessment in their mother tongue or whether the performance of some in English might by then also have improved somewhat. Other information of relevance is available for some of the children which will be discussed later. In addition it has proved possible to retest these children in English early in their second year in school. The results of this repeat testing will be reported at the end of this chapter and their relationship to the earlier assessment in English and Punjabi considered.

Table 10.1 Comparison of results on PLAI in English and in Punjabi

Scores in English	Scores in Punjabi A	B	C	D	E	F	In-complete	Not tested	Total
A	-	1	-	-	-	-		-	1
B	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	1	4
C	-	2	4	1	-	-	-	2	9
D	-	3	4	4	-	-	1	3	15
E	-	2	4	3	-	3		4	16
F	-	2		2	-	-	2	6	12
Totals	-	11	12	10	-	3	5	16	57

The column labelled incomplete includes children whom an attempt was made to test in Punjabi, for whom it was their mother tongue, and who either answered in English, or would not respond. Included in that column are two children who scored high in the test in English. Two of the three children who scored low in both English and Punjabi were among those who failed to respond to a large number of questions in English. Even when tested later in Punjabi, however, their level of performance did not improve. The third child in that category had few non responses in English. Both children whose scores improved dramatically in this subsequent testing (moving from F to B) had numerous non responses in English on the earlier testing: this does not of

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course mean the result was purely an effect of the test situation. There was evidence from other sources that one at least of these children was indeed fluent in Punjabi at an early stage but not yet fluent in English.

Since there was a range of a year's difference in age between the oldest and youngest children tested in both English and Punjabi it seemed important here also to consider scores in relation to age. In the group of 41 children tested on PLAI in both languages there were 16, 11 and 14 children respectively in the oldest, middle and youngest age groups. None of the 14 children in the youngest group scored A, B or C in English, while 11 of 27 children in the two other groups scored at that level shortly after entry to school. The three lowest levels of functioning D, E and F were, however, found in the older as well as the youngest group when tested in English. When tested again later in the session this time in Punjabi, however, there was a spread of scores in that language from B to F in the oldest and the youngest age group, with at least one child in every group failing to complete the test in Punjabi. Thus, as might be expected even in a group of children for whom Punjabi was their mother tongue, age difference was not a sufficient explanation for the level of scores. This issue will be explored further with the assistance of case studies since some of these children used Punjabi in a play setting even at the pre-school stage and with different levels of competence.

Just as the evidence from a single assessment in English of these children cannot be taken in isolation, likewise this assessment must be considered in context and studied together with the evidence of the language competence displayed by the children in different contexts and over time. It seems likely, however, that children who are competent in this assessment neither in English nor in their mother tongue are likely to have severe difficulties. Children who are functioning at a high level in one or other language are likely to develop successfully in the school setting: there is already evidence of their ability to respond effectively to questions of different levels of complexity and perceptual distance. If they have this skill in their mother tongue at least, it seems likely that they will develop from that a competence also in English at an early stage. Further evidence on this is available from classroom and playground observation.

It should be stressed that those testing the children in Punjabi did not know the scores which the children had obtained on prior testing in English. Where children appear to be unable to understand the English version it would then be possible with Punjabi speakers to make the assessment in their mother tongue and thus determine at this early stage whether the difficulties they encounter are only in English or whether they have limited discourse skills even in their own language - an important diagnostic distinction.

Developing Competence in English

A comparison will now be made between the performance of the children when tested in English on PLAI on two occasions a year apart, also between their performance when tested in Punjabi and when retested in English. The first assessment was shortly after entry to reception class (age range 4+ to 5+ years), the assessment in Punjabi was a few months later, and the retesting in English shortly after the start of their second year in school (age range 5+ to 6+ years). Although a number of children when assessed in Punjabi had shown a higher level of competence than when assessed initially in English it was not legitimate, because of the possible effects of retesting and the timelag, to attribute such differences necessarily to greater competence in Punjabi. In spite of its limitations this reassessment in English provides valuable further evidence on the development of some of the children. By this age it would be expected that most children whose mother tongue was English would show competence on all four levels of questions. Since for these children this was their second or third attempt at the test (though with a different tester on at least two of the occasions) marked improvement would certainly be expected. There were indeed a number of children who showed an increasing score over each assessment, that is with the Punjabi score lying between the two scores in English. There were other children who showed a dramatic improvement on this final testing. Still other children were unable to cope with the demands of the task.

Only two of the children who had been assessed in both English and in Punjabi had left, the remaining 39 were retested in English. In addition it was decided to retest in English children who had initially been tested in English but who had not been tested in Punjabi because they appeared on informal discussion not to have sufficient competence, spoke a form of Mirpuri dialect at that stage, or were away in India at the time of the assessment. All but one such child remaining in these schools was reassessed. That child had scored for initial testing and was frequently absent. The total number reassessed was 51 of the 57 children originally tested in English. Three children were assessed both in English and in Punjabi, the testing being recorded on video to provide possible material for in-service work. Two of the children selected had scored high initially in English and also when tested in Punjabi. They were video recorded while tested in both languages, having been tested previously by two different testers. On this occasion in spite of the additional stress they performed again on a high level in both languages and appeared stimulated by the experience. An interview with the father of one of these children was recorded in English and in Punjabi. The other child recorded on video had scored low in English initially but high in Punjabi and had been recorded in the nursery class speaking fluently in Punjabi. In this video recording, assessed in English and in Punjabi by two different adults, the child now scored comparably, and high, in both languages. A young sibling who had recently entered the nursery class was also assessed on video in both languages.

Mrs. Garcha, as a member of the Steering Committee for the research had used PLAI in her own school in both English and Punjabi. During her secondment to Birmingham in the autumn term 1983-84 as a Priorsfield Fellow she assisted with this repeat testing and with preparation of the video tapes. The remainder of the retesting was undertaken by Miss Dewhirst. Care was taken to ensure that both testers were administering the test in a comparable way. Mrs. Garcha then tested the children in one of the schools, and Miss Dewhirst in the other. The former school had a number of children whom it had not been possible to test in Punjabi. Mrs. Garcha talked informally with each child in Punjabi and was able to confirm that by this time all the children had at least a minimum competence in and understanding of Punjabi. It is worth noting the parallel scores and similar trend in the two schools on this testing.

A comparison of the scores in English on the two occasions is shown in Table 10.2.

Table 10.2 Comparison of results on PLAI in English on retesting after one year

Scores in First test	Scores on retest in English						Age grouping[x]			
	A	B	C	D	E	F	1	2	3	Totals
A	1						-	1	-	1
B	4						1	2	1	4
C	3	2	2				5	2	-	7
D	7	3	5				4	3	8	15
E	1	4	6	2	1	-	8	-	5	14
F	2	1	1	2	1	3	-	1	9	10
1	6	5	6	1	-	-				18
2	5	2	2	-	-	1				10
3	7	3	6	3	2	2				23
Totals	18	10	14	4	2	2	18	10	23	51

Notes: A high score, F low score
[x] 1 children with dates of birth up to 31.12.77
2 children with dates of birth between 1.1.78 and 30.4.78
3 children with dates of birth on or after 1.5.78

As may be seen, 18 children now showed competence in English in responding to questions on all four levels (as compared with only one on the initial assessment) and a further 10 children responded to questions at three levels (as compared with only four on the previous assessment). Two children who now responded currently to questions on all four levels, scoring A had scored only F on the initial testing in English, both were among the youngest children in the age group. One had scored B when tested in Punjabi, the other scored only D. The other child whose score changed dramatically, from F to B, was the child whose assessment was video recorded, and this child also was one of the youngest in the age group. There were, even on this repeat assessment one year later, still children able to cope at most with the Level 1 questions. There were nine such children, seven of whom were in the youngest age group. As may be seen from the Table these children had made little if any improvement in their scores. The relative ages of the children scoring at different levels are shown in an extension to Table 10.2 where 1 indicates the oldest group (of 18 children), 2 indicates the middle age group (of 10) and 3 indicates the youngest group (of 23). Ten of this latter group now achieved scores of either A or B although a few were still unable to respond adequately.

Before discussing these results further it seems important to consider the relationship between the children's scores when tested in Punjabi and this retesting in English. These results are shown in Table 10.3.

Table 10.3 Comparison of results on PLAI in Punjabi and retest in English

Scores in Punjabi	Scores in English on retest A	B	C	D	E	F	Totals
A	-						-
B	8	2	1				11
C	3	3	4				10
D	3	3	3	1			10
E	-						-
F			2	1			3
Incomplete	2	1	-	-	1	1	5
Not tested	2	1	4	2	1	2	12
Totals	18	10	14	4	2	3	51

Note: A high score, F low score.

As may be seen from the table ten children scored A or B in both English and in Punjabi. There were in addition children who while scoring high in English did not complete the test in

Punjabi or scored at Level 1 or below. It should also be noted that among the nine children who were still scoring D, E or F in English were five children whom it had not been possible to test in Punjabi, two who had not completed the test, while the remaining two scored F and D. Thus there is not evidence that these very low scoring children in English at this stage were competent in such a task in their mother tongue. Two of these children, among the youngest, had recently come to the United Kingdom it was thought from rural areas, and the mother of one was known to be illiterate. There was some relevant background information about several of these children who were not only unable to cope in English but of limited competence in Punjabi also. Clearly the problems of these low scoring children were not confined to the English language which is diagnostically relevant information. Since most were very young it is perhaps pertinent to consider whether in addition to providing them with continued support on an intensive basis from the Ethnic Minority Support Service they should be given an opportunity to repeat a class to consolidate the early stages of their education, where this evidence of their difficulties is reinforced by evidence of lack of progress in the basic skills. A further issue is the possible value of assisting such children towards greater facility in their mother tongue.

As may be seen in Tables 10.2 and 10.3 there were 14 children who scored only C when reassessed in English, that is, responded to Level 1 and 2 questions but not to Levels 3 and 4. While some of these children were among the youngest in the age group. they were spread across the age group. Two of the children who had scored C and D on previous testing had been in India during the Punjabi testing. All but one of the others (who scored C) had scored D, E or F on previous testing in English. Only one child scored higher in Punjabi than on this testing in English (2 scored F and 3 scored D in Punjabi) as shown in Table 10.3.

The evidence from these assessments over time and in English and Punjabi provides valuable information on the development of the children's competence in English. The results show that there are children who scored impressively high in both languages. There are others who still appeared to have very limited competence in English, none of whom were found to be capable in the test situation of performing on a high level in Punjabi. There are, however, some children competent in English but with more limited competence in Punjabi. It should be noted that in these schools regular supplementary teaching of English in small groups has been provided for these children during at least their first year at school. A number are still receiving such help. It is hoped on the basis of these results to provide both diagnostic information and some guidelines for remedial help for the children still showing limited competence. The competence and enthusiasm of most of these children during this repeat testing, which has been commented upon by both testers, is a tribute to the intensive work of the teaching staff in these schools. It is hoped that they and others will gain insights from the results of this study which will enable them to stimulate the most able children, whose performance was impressive, and also to promote the development of those still shown to have very limited competence.

CHAPTER 11

TEACHER-CHILD DIALOGUE

The amount of opportunity for a class teacher to engage in discussion with individual children is limited and constrained by the demands and needs of the other children whatever the pattern of organisation within the classroom. Furthermore any discussion which is initiated by the teacher may be interrupted by competing demands from other activities or children. The time available is unlikely to be shared equally by the children. Some children seek and achieve attention, are able and determined to communicate with adults: for some children discussion with their teachers is something they themselves can and do initiate with skill and sustain with contributions which lead the adult to continue the interaction. Other children seldom spontaneously initiate discussion with an adult in school for a variety of reasons: they may indeed lack skill in doing so. Alternatively or additionally they may have learnt from bitter experience that such experiences are not rewarding for them because what they have initiated has turned out to be a series of questions. sometimes rather unrelated to the topic they had hoped to develop. The skilful conversationalist among young children. who also knows how to use these skills within the school language conventions, and thus without appearing forward or rude in the school situation, can sometimes in spite of rather than because of the adults' questions, sustain and develop an interaction. The child with limited language is constrained or may even be confused by a series of apparently unrelated questions from the adult who may know where it is hoped they will lead but may not make this explicit enough for children with limited language competence. In a home situation and with adults who know the child well it is often possible because of extensive shared experiences to prompt and aid the child whose skills are less well developed, or whose 'surface' language is less accurate, in such a way that the dialogue is supported. The skilled conversationalist whether adult or child has the ability to encourage companions to develop their ideas not only by questions which lead to further development of a theme, but also by related comments. and by a demonstrated interest in the concerns of others. This may be apparent in pacing of interjections - and even in silences long enough for the other person to continue and expand a theme.

Clearly it cannot be expected that all teachers will be natural skilled conversationalists, or that they will be equally successful with all children. Some teachers can sustain a conversation with the able children which is of genuine interest to both participants: others are better able to be supportive of the less competent child's stumbling attempts to communicate. It is important that we consider whether additional available time to spend with individual children would in itself be sufficient to facilitate children's language or whether for many teachers it is necessary to train them to use such time effectively.

In a recent research by the senior author (reported in Clark, Robson and Browning 1982) one focus was dialogue in preschool settings of children with communication difficulties. These samples of language were collected in free play settings in preschool units using a radiomicrophone, as were the preschool samples in the early stages of the present study. There were within both of these studies instances of adult-child interchanges which showed more and less successful strategies in encouraging and supporting children with communication difficulties. Some of the lessons from the earlier study relevant for teacher training have already been reported. In the present section the focus is on teacher-initated dialogue with selected children in the reception classroom. undertaken at the request of the research team. The teacher was asked to talk in a one-to-one situation, with selected children for a few minutes in such a way as to show the children's dialogue skills, also to 'stretch' the children thus showing the limit of their ability in dialogue. Included in the 'target' children were some who on the language test had been able in their abilities to meet the demands of questions of different levels of complexity, and others who had found great difficulty. All were children for whom other samples of language were available. Samples of 40 children's dialogue in this setting were recorded and transcribed, in discussion with six of the reception class teachers. Twenty-five of these children were among 44 children who were also recorded in the group situations with other children, to be discussed in the following chapter.

The teachers in this study, to whom choice of task and topic was left, varied in their way of establishing the context for the discussion as well as their style within the task selected as a focus. The possibilities for the more and less able children to show their level of competence was to some extent influenced by the task chosen. Teachers asked the child to recall an already shared experience of a story, or to describe a picture, or used a reading book to talk around the pictures. Depending on the nature of the questions, these contexts gave some of the less able children confidence to answer though often only in single word responses. The 'right-wrong' nature of the structure this provided did on occasion if the questioning was too complex, often because 'multiple questions' were asked in one exchange, lead to embarrassed silences. Such settings if rigidly adhered to are not 'real' communications as there is no genuine audience. The person asking the questions (the teacher) is already knowledgeable on the answers and decides what is right and what is wrong. The contribution of the teacher was often almost exclusively a series of questions, on which the child appears to be 'tested'. The task itself was, however, only one of the influences which clearly interacted with teacher style and the ability of the child to initiate and expand beyond the bounds of the task, or to redirect attention to another topic. Some of the teachers, seemed to find it difficult to initiate and sustain such a dialogue, except with the most able who were contributing information beyond the demands of the questions. It was clear, as might have been anticipated, that those teachers who regarded dialogue with the children as part of their curriculum were better able, even in this artificial situation, to sustain a 'real' conversation with the most able who clearly knew they were both free and encouraged to contribute not just answers, but views of their own - a challenge which the children who had scored high on the language test accepted. Occasionally they redirected the discussion, corrected the teacher or supplied interesting new dimensions. Any children who did develop interesting dialogue in these settings had scored high on the language test: not all those who scored high were, however, found to 'rise' to this situation, or to be stimulated either by the task set, or the approach adopted, or questions asked by the teacher. Some examples of the difference in the quality of children's language in different settings will be discussed in the following chapters. From these recordings it was clear that many of the children did have well developed conversational skills which enabled them to initiate as well as to respond to the questions and initiations of others. In this chapter discussion will be confined to general points, supported by extracts from the transcripts of teacher-child dialogue. The transcripts will also be used to develop materials to assist in training teachers to interact with the less able children in ways which are meaningful, interesting and educationally valuable.

The strategy adopted by one of the teachers who regards the development of oral competence as a high priority was such that even in this situation she shared her own opinions and reactions, which stimulated the more able children, and even achieved genuine initiation from some of those who were less able. She did not always take the lead yet was clearly in command of the situation for most of the time, except the odd occasion where an able child asked questions which she found embarrassing to answer and the child pressed the advantage home! One such was a child who asked the purpose of the radiomicrophone and was not put off with the inadequate answer which the teacher found necessary to give because of the research situation. Within these settings it was clear that this teacher already knew a great deal about the children, their families, their likes and dislikes. This enabled her to draw out further the more able - it also helped her support some of the less able because she had some awareness of what they might be attempting to communicate. It was noticeable in these samples that questions might come from adult - or from the child as might initiations. The teacher might be 'wrong' or puzzled and the child require to expand to make a point clear. More didactic teacher questioning styles were more inclined to have a format within which the teachers asked frequent questions, and multiple questions, and the child was attempting to achieve the 'right' answer sought by the questioner. Within some of these question/answer styles of adult-child dialogue the able children were not stretched except for a few who spontaneously gave additional information which 'helped' provide the teacher with a context for her next question. Where a teacher did not hear the answer and repeated the question or said 'Pardon' the child in such a situation was inclined to assume the answer was wrong and change it!

There was evidence in some samples of teachers trying a succession of 'tasks' or a change of focus because of the child's failure to respond to the previous choice. On occasion this succeeded but more often the child was not more successful. To the reader of the transcript or the person listening to the tape it appeared in few instances that there was a clearcut theme throughout the interaction, within which the adult was supporting the child by varying the pace, the level of the questions, or by providing additional setting by making some relaxed comments. On the contrary the main changes were in topic, not strategy. This could succeed with the more able child who was merely uninterested in the first topic, or had become bored with it. With the less able child this in some instances appeared only to lead to further confusion, more silences, embarrassment and what appeared like relief, on the part of adult and child as the 'conversation' terminated.

The teachers when talking with the children in a one-to-one situation were inclined to use questions to excess to initiate and sustain dialogue, and to use questions which varied little in their level of complexity, requiring certain types of labelling and frequently answers of one or two words. Such questions were found to feature extensively in much of the dialogue in these situations and where they did they often failed to stretch the more able children. On occasion confusion was caused to the less able where strings of such questions were asked. Examples of such 'strings' of which there were many are as follows:

1) T. A doll? Have you got any dolls at home? And what are their names? Have you got names for them?

C. Yes.

2) T. And what has a rabbit got on his face here? What do you call these? Did you do that on your Easter rabbit? These things that come out from your nose? What do we say they are called - whiskers. So he's got whiskers on his face. Look what colour is he?

C. Brown and white and black.

3) T. Is he a big brother? Is he your big brother? Doesn't he play in the band at school? Does he? What does he play? Do you know the name of the instrument?

C. (Shakes his head).

4) T. Was it lovely? Was it very hot there? Was it hot? Did you wear warm clothes like this? What did you wear?

C. Shorts.

5) T. Are they playing? Is that like the house you live in? Or would you like to live in a house like that? Would you? You don't live in a house like that though, do you? Where do you live?

The first two examples are from dialogue with less able children who clearly found these multiple questions difficult especially as this was a frequently used strategy. Examples 3) and 4) were in discussion with more able children, for one of whom English was a second language, who both coped with such questions. The teacher from whose dialogue example (5) was taken was herself concerned when she realised that she had adopted this strategy even to the extent that she had early in discussion with an able child who responded with interesting dialogue later when a more conversational style was adopted.

Another tendency was to ask forced-choice questions repeatedly such as:

"Did you come back on the same day or another day?"
"Were they naughty birds or good birds?"
"Is it right up to the top or is it low down to the bottom?"
"Do you think they're hiding or looking for something?"

On occasion these supported the less able children who were encouraged to answer as for example in the last example above which gained the answer:

"They're looking .... for a owl."

Used to excess as they were with some children they prevented development of a dialogue. On occasion they were also hiding the severity of a child's difficulties since he or she appeared to be coping with more difficult questions. Where a forced-choice question was at the end of a 'string', the child might not have understood the preceding questions in for example:

T. "When did you think it was, was it perhaps last weekend? Who did you go with?

C. My dad.

Examples of teacher-child dialogue

Some extracts from teacher-child dialogue will be presented illustrative of different teaching styles and children of different levels of competence. Evidence may be seen of the points noted with reference to the frequency of adult questions, their level and responses they elicit. Some able children responded beyond the questions asked and their necessary reply, thereby the discussion flowed and was extended. Perhaps two extracts from discussions with a more able child will illustrate the difficulties faced by the child and the ways these were overcome:

Child 1 (two extracts from a lengthy conversation)

T. To the bedroom? To your bedroom? Have you got a bedroom? Are you the one that sleeps in it? Or does somebody else sleep in it?

C. No.

T. Just you on your own?

C. My brother sleeps in the bedroom but he has his own bed ....

T. You've got lovely long hair haven't you? Did mummy wash it, did she wash it with shampoo? Do you always have it in a pony tail or do you have it in something different?

C. I have it all different sometimes ....

The following example is also from an able child who within the constraints of this setting does not develop a dialogue. While this is only an extract the child continues to respond in this way to the series of questions, a number of which are, as here, multiple requiring only one word answers.

Child 2 (two extracts).

T. You think she's lived there for three months do you? Is that a long time or a short time?

C. Long.

T. You think she's lived there a long time? You think three months is a long time? And is this the block of flats here in your picture?

C. (Silence)

T. Is that the number of your mommy's flat? She lives in number 68? Can you tell me anything more about it?

C. No.

T. No.

C. Those are all the windows.

T. Those are all the windows? How many windows are there?....

The next two extracts are of children who had scored high on the language test. They are in discussion with a teacher who is a genuine audience, sharing her likes and dislikes. She was herself horrified on seeing the transcript to note just how many questions she piled up in the early stages if the child was slow to answer! The first child is Afro-Caribbean in ethnic origin. The second child is Asian in ethnic origin English is the second language and Punjabi is the language spoken by his parents in the home.

Child 3 (three extracts from a lengthy conversation).

C. Yes, and some of the time she says the dinners are horrible.

T. What doesn't she like?

C. She doesn't like shepherd's pie.

T. Shepherd's pie! Oh I like shepherd's pie it's one of my favourites.

C. I like shepherd's pie.

C. I had some dinner with Frances.

T. Did you, what did you have for dinner?

C. Chicken and rice and peas.

T. That sounds good.

C. and ice cream

T. What games do you like playing?

C. The hokey-kokey.

T. The hokey-kokey (laughs). We do that at school sometimes don't we? Gets a bit noisy doesn't it? That's the only problem.

C. People fall down and be silly ....

Child 4 (a short extract from the conversation which was sustained).

T. Are you going to tell me about your picture?

C. The car's trying to knock the girl off.

T. The car's knocking the girl over? Oh dear, how did that happen? Wasn't she looking where she was going? What's going to happen?

C. The man say to the boy, get the girl and then I'll knock her over.

T. You mean he did it on purpose?

It is worth noting that the child was able to communicate information, and with the interest and support of the teacher make himself understood, although he had not yet completely grasped constructions of sentences in English. Some examples from other parts of the conversation were:

"Already in my house"

"My daddy come back from Pakistan"

"He says I'm gonna, he says I'll stay there about 6 weeks and I'll come back. Cos gone bring my big brother"

"She, she, when mum when my mummy in the bed and then she climbs up on the settee and she, she don't fall on the settee, and she just stands".

The next extract is also from a relatively able child who enjoys talking and has the ability and interest in responding to simple labelling questions to give extended answers and additional comments. This child does, however, need help in responding to specific demands of questions and higher level questions which are within her competence. She will successfully 'duck' or side track more complex demands unless care is taken.

Child 5 (three extracts from a lengthy discussion).

T. Why do you think they're watching telly?

C. I think they are lying down watching telly.

T. Lying down where?

C. Lying down on the settee.

T. Oh I see. The curtains are closed are they so it must be ....

C. The lights must be on.

T. The light must be on so what time of the day must it be?

C. About 9 o'clock.

C. She's miss ... She's got a fork in her hand and she's got a fork and she's gonna do so/me tea ... or she might be drinking chocolate. I bet she's got some kids.

T. And what do we call those things in the bag there?

C. I don't know.

T. Tools.

C. I never heard that name.

T. Haven't you. Some tools to help him mend the car.

C. It's nearly toys.

T. Yes it sounds like toys. Is he outside or inside?

The following example is from an able child who in answering [illegible] beyond the demands of the questions and thus extends the dialogue which later becomes interesting to both participants.

Child 6 (an extract from a discussion on T.V. in which the child is discussing funny and frightening things).

C. I'm only scared when the lights are off though.

T. Who puts the light off then?

C. Sometimes Mum. When my mum turns the lights off when a scary films on, I'm scared.

T. Oh, yes.

C. They bring a blanket downstairs.

T. You bring a blanket downstairs?

C. Yes. To cover ourselves up.

The following is an example of a child who holds his own in conversation. He still needs help and support, is willing to answer but not always able to express his answers clearly enough for the listener to understand. He is, however, willing to take the teacher's corrections and learn from them and is at a stage when he could be helped by such settings. When tested he could cope with Level 1 and 2 questions. In this dialogue there was evidence of some difficulties. As there were few Level 3 or 4 questions, his difficulties were not so apparent as they might have been.

Child 7

T. What do you do in the kitchen?

C. My mum cooks some sausages.

T. Oh. How do you cook sausages?

C. Uh

T. How do you cook sausages?

C. Not me - my mum.

T. How does your mum cook sausages? You tell me.

C. She's older.

The child is able enough to use this evasive strategy to avoid answers he doesn't know. The teacher then manages to lead him through the stages of cooking.

T. How do you know the sausages are ready? When they're cooked? Do they turn a different colour?

C. Yes, they change their colour to white.

The following child needs some support and is aided by the structure of the story retelling and the teacher's supportive comments.

Child 8

T. You saw a black monster? So he's a big black monster. Right! What sort of monster is he?

C. Very strong.

T. Very strong! Yeah!

C. He growls.

T. He growls! Yes!

C. When he growls ....

T. Yeah

C. Frightens the poor mother.

The remaining three children all have considerable difficulties. For the first two English is a second language in which they still have limited competence. They are supported through retelling of a story. The closely focussed questions assist the first child to respond with short answers which are reinterpreted and elaborated by the teacher in a way that sustains the dialogue.

Child 9 (an extract)

C. That's a little boy.

T. That's a little boy. What's the monster doing to the little boy then?

C. Eat him.

T. He's going to eat him, oh! Poor little boy.

C. In, In his hand.

T. He's in his hand. He is isn't he? Where's the monster going to put him?

C. Eat up.

T. How's he going to eat him?

C. He put in the mouth.

T. In the mouth? That's right.

C. Eat up.

Child 10 (This interaction starts with many silences but the child is encouraged to respond).

T. He pulled and it didn't come. So what did the old man do? Who did he go and tell?

C. (Silence)

T. Do you remember? Oh! You can. He went and asked who? The little old ....

C. Woman.

T. Yes! You did know. The little old woman. Did she help him? What did she do?

C. Pulled

The final example is of a child with very severe difficulties who responds with silence, or shakes of the head. The child is gradually encouraged to supply the occasional new word in a supportive setting where the teacher gives information about herself. The sample below shows some of the problems, the contrast with those from whom extracts were quoted earlier, also some misunderstandings.

Child 11 (an extract showing the difficulties of this child).

T. I wonder where the bus is going?

C. To America.

T. To America! Can you get a bus to go all the way to America? That sounds lovely. Would you like to go to America?

C. (Silence)

T. I've been to America a long, long time ago.

C. Yes.

T. My sister lives in America and I went to see her. Who could you go to see in America?

C. Grandma.

T. Hmm.

C. Grandma and Grandad.

T. Oh! Is that where they live? Oh! How lovely. Have they lived there for a long time?

C. (Shakes head)

T. No? Can you tell me about your grandma and grandad.

C. (Silence)

T. What are they like?

C. They're like a little baby.

Comments on Teacher-child dialogue

A number of the teachers had regretted that there was not more time available to spend with individual children, or more adult help to provide such contacts. In either situation the class-teacher would have an important role either as the communicator or in supervising another adult in sustaining discussions which could be educationally valuable to these young children. It is appreciated that the situation in which the teachers were placed in this aspect of the research when they had artificially to initiate and cease conversation with given children in turn, when wearing a radiomicrophone, would have been stressful and this has been borne in mind in analysing the discussions which ensued. There are, however, a number of points which can be made and which provide important guidelines for in-service work. One justification for generalisations from these samples is the extent to which this evidence supports and extends the findings of the earlier study where the language samples were collected in free play situations. In these settings the adults often came to join a child who was already at play with others and joined in the discussion or initiated a new topic around the experience. In this present aspect the teacher was in control in a much more explicit way as the child was asked to come and talk with the teacher who determined the focus and the duration of the exchange.

There were, however, marked similarities between these samples of adult-child dialogue and those in the preschool study. The adults tended to ask a series of questions, often requiring only labelling responses and a few words in answer. Even children with limited competence and for whom English was a second language were often asked a string of questions each of which would have required a different answer. Some of these strings of questions ended with a 'forced-choice' question. There were only a few instances where the adult was a real audience, or where the child was encouraged to volunteer and elaborate information unknown to the teacher. The result was in many cases an artificial and test-like situation with right answers already known to the teacher at which the children were guessing. A few of the more able children went beyond the demands of the questions and supplied additional information which then was developed further. There were, however, other children who had shown ability in the language test on entry to school to answer higher level complex questions who within this present framework showed little evidence of this ability. Few questions were asked demanding reasoning, explanation, or descriptions to an uninformed listener. Clearly this situation was stressful to some of the children of limited competence - and it seemed to the adult who was attempting to draw them out.

Had there been no evidence available on the language abilities of these children other than these transcripts it might have been concluded that the children had limited ability to respond to more complex questions, that they were limited in their ability to initiate and sustain conversation, and that they were unable to use complex or even several simple sentences in conversation. Evidence from the language tests showed that many of these children even at entry to school could cope with questions of high levels of complexity. Samples of language from the preschool units, from the playground and from other settings showed just how complex was the dialogue that some could initiate and sustain. Some of these children entered the reception class with such skills: other children appeared limited in their competence. The challenge is to assist the more able to display and develop their skills further and to help the less competent to develop these skills. Furthermore the children for whom English is a second language, even if able in their own language, do require an opportunity to develop oral language competence in English also. Clearly additional time to talk with individual children is not itself sufficient to achieve these objectives. In the following chapter reference will be made to the responses of the children in group discussion and the possible contribution of such settings to the oral language development of children of different levels of competence.

CHAPTER 12

GROUP DISCUSSION BETWEEN YOUNG CHILDREN

This aspect of the research included 44 of the 215 children who had been assessed on the language test about the time of entry to the reception class. An attempt was made to include the children whose language had been recorded in other settings. It proved possible to include 25 of the children who had been recorded in discussion with their teacher. One school was omitted as few children had entered at the beginning of the session and most of these were indigenous white children. This study was planned and carried out by a research student who was herself a teacher of young children and who used small group discussions in her own teaching. On the basis of her experience and also the need to ensure that the voices of the individual children could be identified on the tape for subsequent analysis each group was limited to four children. An attempt was made to include within each group a more able child, a less able child and two who had been in the middle range when assessed earlier on the language test. To this end a list was prepared for each school with the children grouped into three categories from which the researcher chose the groups. Because of between school differences and absences of a few of the target children there were differences between groups in the range of language competence: the full range of scores was, however, represented within the total. No attempt was made to match groups for ethnic background of the children, which would in any case have been difficult, if not impossible as an additional variable to language competence, in view of the differing proportions of children from the various ethnic backgrounds in the four schools. In the event all groups had children from more than one ethnic background: six groups had children from all three ethnic backgrounds, two groups had no indigenous white child, two had no child of Asian ethnic origin and one group had no child of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin. There were 12 children for whom English was a second language and a further 16 who were of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin. The researcher chose the children for a particular group from the list with which she had been provided to meet only the criterion of variation in language competence: no attempt was made to include friendship groupings or even children who knew each other.

The children were taken from their classroom to as quiet an alternative setting as could be arranged. The four children were then asked to sit round an already prepared table on which was a tray covered with a cloth. The research worker explained to the children that she would join them in a few minutes after she had completed some work. Meantime they were encouraged to explore the objects on the tray. These included a torch which was assembled, a torch in parts and some colour paddles with which colour patterns could be formed. A radiomicrophone was used to record any conversation which ensued and the researcher meantime sat quietly in the background writing. She noted any relevant points concerning the interactions between the children and the extent to which they played with the objects. During a pilot study she found it was necessary to be present to note relevant points but that it was possible at that stage to be non-participant. Subsequently she joined the group and took part in the discussion. Only in a few instances did the children appeal to her or attempt to involve her in the discussion in the early stages. As a final stage she suggested to the children they might like to write about what they had been doing. She then produced writing materials for the children to use. This study will be reported in full elsewhere but reference will be made here to some of the important findings of relevance to this research.

The use of the radiomicrophone resulted in clear recordings although in a few of the settings there was considerable background noise and in some instances interruptions which may have affected the discussions. All the dialogue on the tapes was transcribed and annotated with background notes. The transcripts were then analysed in three parts - before the adult joined the group, after she took part in the discussion but before the topic of writing was introduced, and after she introduced the topic of writing. A count was made of every turn taken by any of the children within each of these three sections and of the adult turns. The transcripts were then further analysed within each section to determine whether a turn consisted of a single word, a phrase, a single sentence or more than one sentence. A further analysis was undertaken to determine the number of simple and complex sentences and questions used by each of the children within each of the sections of the transcript and by the adult. All these recordings were made towards the end of the child's first year in school and the age range was from 4 years 7 months to 5 years 9 months. All but four of the children had entered the reception class on or near the beginning of the school year. All but six of the children had attended nursery school or class at least for a limited period, at least part-time.

Results of the group discussions

The time which the total discussion lasted varied between groups, as did the separate sections within a group, depending on environmental circumstances such as play-time, interruptions and the extent to which the children's interest was sustained. In spite of all these reservations and the range of language competence of the children the first important point to stress is that in this setting and before the involvement of the adult all but two of the children did seek and obtain turns. One of these two children was an able but very shy boy in a group of relatively able children within which limited discussion took place due to a variety of circumstances. Initially there was silence in that group, then the children whispered and could not be heard. The other child who did not speak was a child for whom English was a second language and whose score on initial testing in English was among the lowest. That group was the other which failed to develop in spite of the presence of three relatively able children. In all the remaining groups there was evidence that even when the four children were on their own they did all take part. Only five children had less than ten turns, including the two referred to above and another child in each of these same groups. Ten further children had between 10 and 19 turns before the adult joined the group: the remaining 29 children spoke on more than 30 occasions during the child-child discussion.

In few instances was there a marked increased in the number of contributions from individual children after the arrival of the adult at which stage the conversation turned in most instances to recounting for the adult what they had been doing and discussing. In spite of herself, the researcher found she had dominated the conversation and in all groups had more turns than any of the children! Had it not been for the evidence from the earlier part of the transcript it would have been possible to argue that the contribution of the adult was necessary to stimulate the children to talk. Her presence made little difference to the extent of the contribution of three of the five children who had said little in the earlier stages. The remaining two children, both able and in the same group, did contribute with her stimulus, indeed the level of participation by all four children in this group increased dramatically.

The first important point to stress thus is that when presented with an interesting stimulus, including objects which they were permitted to handle and by which they were intrigued, these children did talk, even without the intervention of the adult. If attention is directed only to the ten children who when assessed had scored D, E or F on their comprehension of questions of different levels of complexity in English it should be noted that these children did have frequent opportunities to participate. In the first two sections of the dialogue before and after the involvement of the adult only three of these children had less than 20 turns, three had over 30 turns, three had over 40 turns and one over 60 turns. The section on writing was not recorded for four of the groups as these were part of a preliminary study at which stage only the writing samples were collected but not that part of the discussion. The six low scoring children who were in the remaining groups continued to have turns in the final aspect of the recording. These low scoring children were thus part of the groups in which they had been placed to the extent that they had an opportunity to contribute and to practice language in a dialogue setting.

The fact that the children did talk in this setting is clearly important as is the finding that the children shared turns in talking. This is, however, only a minimum essential. It is important to look now at the further analysis of the nature of their relative contributions. Few of the turns which the children took in the child-child dialogue were of only a word in length. If the simple word and phrase turns are considered together no child had more than twelve such turns (only four children had more than ten and only one of these children scored below C on the language test). Furthermore all children contributed some simple sentences to the child-child discussion (except the two referred to earlier who did not speak during that section): 37 children contributed at least one turn that was more than one sentence in length.

When the adult joined the discussion there was greater evidence of the children's turns being either a single word or a phrase in length. Twelve children had more than ten turns which were only a word or phrase in length at that second stage (a pattern which was even greater in the final phase where 13 of the 28 children recorded had ten or more turns of only a word or phrase in duration). There was evidence of an increase in the number of turns of more than one sentence in length in only seven children after the adult joined the groups and four of these children were in the able group which had failed to develop: the other three children increased by only one or two.

The next step in the analysis was to consider whether the children contributed any complex sentences: 29 children did so within the child-child dialogue and about the same number used such sentences in the presence of the adult; though more of the children used only one such sentence in the latter setting.

One further aspect of the analysis is worth noting here before turning to some examples of the content of the dialogue and that is the numbers of questions asked by the children and by the adult. In the child-child dialogue 33 of the children did ask some questions, and a comparable number also asked questions when the adult was present. When a comparison was made between the single statements of sentence length which were and were not questions it was found that all children made at least as many statements as they asked questions in the child-child dialogue: this was true for all but one child also in the presence of the adult. In contrast, the adult was more likely to contribute questions than make simple sentence length statements. The one exception was in a group in which she also contributed a large number of extended turns to what was clearly an interactive group with complex language from the children. In that group in the early part of child-child discussion all participants had over 20 turns, all used turns of more than one sentence in length, all used questions and all but one used complex sentences. By the end of the whole conversation these four reception class children in this group had been stimulated by this setting to a dialogue in which they had the following number of turns 80, 120, 171 and 169. As a final point it is worth noting that although she was present for only approximately two-thirds of the time the adult had 220 turns!

The evidence from this study is that these children can and do contribute to discussion and can sustain it within a group setting in the absence of an adult provided they are sufficiently stimulated by the context. Furthermore it should be noted that these children were faced with a different room, with children whom they did not necessarily know and with an adult with whom they were not familiar. Contributions which were of more than one sentence in length were given by many of the more able children and complex sentences were used by more able children within each ethnic background. For example, two of these young children for whom English was a second language (the mother tongue of one was Punjabi and the other Gujerati) each contributed in the child-child dialogue in an animated interesting and knowledgeable way, including 31 and 39 turns respectively which were more than one sentence in length.

It is important to consider not only the amount of talk, the turns and the complexity of the structure of the language. The content of what was said and the extent to which it appeared to be communicating and to display the features of dialogue is of course the crucial aspect. Examples will now be given of extracts from the child-child dialogue of six of the groups. These show that whatever the limitations in surface features of their language, and/or their reticence in an adult-child discussion, within this setting a dialogue involving four children was taking place. Each extract is based on only 16 consecutive turns and yet within each of the six groups all four children are involved and do contribute. Similar evidence could have been cited from all the remaining groups (except the two noted earlier where only three of the four children were taking turns). These six groups were selected to make specific points of relevance to this research.

Group I includes three indigenous white children and one child of Asian ethnic origin for whom English is a second language. The latter child is the child referred to above whose mother tongue is Punjabi. It was clear from assessment in that language about the time of these recordings that had the dialogue been in Punjabi in that language also he could have contributed at an impressive level. The child's age at this time was 5 years 3 months!

Group I (age range 5.0 - 5.7)

Child 1 Ind. (A) Child 2 As. (B) Child 3 Ind. (C) Child 4 Ind. (D)
The letters in brackets are the PLAI scores in English.

1.	This goes at the back.	1 drops the battery 2 and 4 still looking at torch 4 has colour paddles, opens them out and looks through
4.	Can see a purple S.., I can see S.. . I can see a purple S.. .	
4.	I can see you different. I can see everything green. I can see everything white.	4 looks through different colours
3.	Is it on?	All four turn to torch which 2 has taken apart. 3 tries to screw end back on
2.	Let me see?	
3.	Have you finished?	
3.	Can't get it back on I can't get it back on.	
4.	Is there a battery in that?	
2.	I know where dis work. When this touch dat, then it works. Look it's touching it.	2 explains how he thinks it works by pointing at different parts. Hasn't managed to put it back together yet
1.	How it works?	
2.	Yes, I'll tell you what I mean. look see that battery. Find the other battery first. This. If you do that it works.	
3.	What do you do?	
4.	I don't know.	
3.	I want this. I can see a red L..	3 picks up the paddles
	Can you Ke..?	1 looks thro' as well.
1.	I can see a red S..	
2.	Here! This is how it works. When this hole touch that, then it works.	

The above extract is from near the beginning of the discussion. Child 2 for whom English is a second language continued to provide a great deal of knowledge throughout the dialogue. By the end of the child-child dialogue the four children had 14, 36 36 and 33 turns respectively. The example above shows not only the dialogue but also the active involvement of all the children with the materials and the role these were playing in stimulating the discussion.

Group II is from a different school and it has the other child for whom English is a second language, whose mother tongue is Gujerati, who was referred to above. This is the group referred to earlier where throughout there was evidence of complex language to which the adult responded and contributed at a later stage.

Group II (age range 5.4 - 5.8)

Child 1 Ind. (A) Child 2 Afro-Car. (C) Child 3 Ind. (C) Child 4 As. (B)

3.	This is a camera	3 has reflector part of torch
4.	It's a torch, really, ain't it	
3.	[illegible] could get real batteries	3 joins 1 and 4 with torch
4.	This is real battery	
2.	Blue, red.	
4.	Oh, no.	
3.	Where's black.	3 goes to 2 and looks at different colours
2.	That ain't black. Black is a dark, dark, dark thing isn't it?	
1.	We nearly broke that.	
4.	Mine won't work cos look there are holes in the batteries	1 and 4 still work on torch. Examine batteries.
1.	Yes	
4.	Aren't they? I think, let me see I wonder if the batteries waste out?	

1. Won't this work?

4. How can it work if one of the
batteries waste?

1. Let me put this in.
Can't work.

4. We need that thing in that
hole. We need that thing in
that, in that hole, don't we?

The above extract is also from near the beginning of the child-child discussion. The children continued to share the discussion and by the end of the section the children had received the following opportunities to contribute 36, 22, 28 and 47 turns respectively.

Group III is from yet another school and in this group two of the children have English as a second language (Child 2 and Child 3). In this group only one of the children is over five years of age. It should be noted that the two children who scored D on the language test were very young when assessed. Child 4 had not attended nursery class, and, was only four years of age on entering reception class.

Group III (age range 4.7 - 5.5)

Child 1 Afro-Car. (A) Child 2 As. (B) Child 3 Other (D) Child 4 Afro-Car. (D)

1.	Don't you know. No! Not there. Pick the glass up.	1 tries to put torch together, helped by 3.
3.	Should I?	
1.	Yea	
3.	What about this.	
1.	No wait a bit. I'm mending it.	
4.	That's, that's good that is.	Looks at pictures on wall.

2. That's a sea creature.

1. No. I have to put it on here to make it.

4. That's purple.

2 and 4 look at colour paddles

2. I like purple ... it's dark

1. Oh yes. You have to have two batteries though. This batteries -

4. The batteries don't come out.

4 comes to help 1 with torch. 3 picks up torch glass and tries to fit it in.

1. So I'll get this one out .... get this out.

3. Where's the glass?

2. It's like a camera.

4. Done it.

This extract is from about the middle of the child-child discussion. It is worth noting that although the individual comments are mainly short all children are actively participating. Extracts from the teacher-child discussion of three of these children were given earlier. Child 1 here was example 3, child 2 here was example 4 and child 4 here was example 11 where the teacher in that context had great difficulty in obtaining contributions from the child. Even that child appears to be benefitting from this setting and is managing to initiate comments and activities.

Group IV is from the same school as the above and has children from two different classes. For two of the children (1 and 3) English is a second language, their mother tongue is Punjabi, and both were successfully tested also in their mother tongue. All these children had attended the nursery class part-time. Child 1 was only about four years of age on entry to reception class as was child 4 in Group III, and like that child scored low on the language test in English. This child had the additional difficulty in this setting that English, was not the mother tongue. In Punjabi the child was fluent.

Group IV (age range 4.10 - 5.8)

Child 1 As. (F) Child 2 Afro-Car. (E) Child 3 As. (C) Child 4 Ind. (A)

1. Somebody broked

2. Here's the card just the... .

4. Are there batteries in this?

4 watches 2.

2. I'm going to do it. Yes

4. Lift it down

3. It's magic

4 shines torch through colour pyramid. His magic is the light circle inside the pyramid.

4. I'm going to do something magic.

3. Let me do it if this works.

4. Ar - Look at this now. Can you see? I can do magic, look! (laughs).

4. Go down. Now I'm going to do some magic. Oh it's green. It's going a different colour. I'm going to do some magic.

4 then puts colour paddles over torch to change colour.

1. Watch those don't fall.

3. Two batteries in, two batteries.

3 takes over broken torch and manages to get it to work.

3. This works! P.., you put two batteries in!

4. Hey, the other one's working!

1. I know.

4. She made it work.

This extract is from near the end of the child-child dialogue. In the early stages much of the dialogue was between the two children who scored higher on the language test (and who were from the same class). It is clear from reading the transcript, however, that the two other children were included in the group. This is true even of child 3 in spite of tho few comments the child made. During the child-child discussion the four children had 21, 6, 36 and 41 turns respectively. By the end of the whole discussion the two children with more limited language understanding (in English for child 1) have had 81 and 29 turns respectively to contribute and have been part of an exciting experience in which the other two children have contributed 90 and 122 turns respectively. In this setting and with the materials to back up the language it appears these children are not only sharing an enjoyable experience but also that the more able are developing their complex language skills for their own benefit and that of the others in the group. Child 1 here is the child in example 9 of the teacher-child dialogue in which setting she spoke only a limited amount.

Group V has been selected to make a rather different point. In that group there were three relatively able children, all of whose language had been recorded in other settings and been found to be dynamic and imaginative. The remaining child in spite of her attempts to become part of the group found her advances continually rejected by the others who quickly formed a group. Requests for some of the materials were rejected and she was teazed by the others, a situation which she did not have the language skills to counter. This is not an isolated example of the difficulties faced by this child who had not attended nursery school with the three others, and had entered school from another area after the beginning of session and when friendships had been continued or established. It is not possible to attribute her difficulties to any one of these features. It has been clear, however, that she is suffering as a result of these difficulties both as regards friendships and academic progress. She and child 2 entered about the beginning of the school year the other two children entered from the same nursery school the following term.

Group V (age range 5.0 - 5.4)

Child 1 Afro-Car. (A) Child 2 Afro-Car. (C) Child 3 As. (C) Child 4 Afro-Car. (D)

1. How do you do that?

3. I don't know how to do it.

2. This goes in ......

4. L..

2. It's shining

4. I want a torch.

No one lets 4 join in. She sits on the edge of group.

3. You're not having this one though. You're having T..'s torch.

2. That goes there, on. It gets in your eyes.

3. Can yer, can yer shine it on this one so I can see what it is. That's better

1. Can't I have that one

4. Can I have a little try. I want a torch.

2. You're not having mine.

3. Look down my ears, T..

1 examines 3's ears

1. Let me, let me. I'm the doctor.

2. It's my torch.

1. L..'s ears are clean like I don't know what.
(Laughter)

then examines 2's. [shortly after] 4 tries to attract attention by showing colour paddles but others ignore her.

It should be noted that although child 3 was recorded as of Asian ethnic origin her mother tongue was English, (close relatives spoke Bengali). During the child-child dialogue of this group there were repeated attempts to seek the involvement of the adult. In the child-child dialogue there were turns by all four children 28, 35, 32 and 17 respectively. Child 2 in this Group is the child in example 5 in the teacher-child dialogue quoted earlier: Child 3 is the child quoted in example 1 of the teacher-child dialogue. A study of the transcript makes clear, however, that the first three children were interacting in an excited and stimulating way. The attempts by child 4 to obtain either a share of the materials, or to be included in the discussion continued to be rejected. While a different grouping might have been sufficient to help a child who is having difficulties in finding acceptance it is clear from other observations that this simple alternative was unlikely of itself to solve this child's difficulties which were increasing over time.

The remaining example is an extract from the child-child dialogue in a group with an able indigenous white child, who did not, however, monopolize the discussion. In the group there were two children for whom English is a second language, neither was able to be tested in their mother tongue. Both were, however, retested in English at the beginning of their second year in school and both by then scored C (that is responded to level 1 and 2 questions only). Child 3 in this extract, who initially scored E, is example 10 in the teacher-child discussion in the previous chapter where there was evidence of great difficulty and little was said. In the child-child dialogue from which this is an extract from near the middle there was much fun and laughter with the colour paddles and torch and the child was an active participant. There was also evidence of communication between all four children who had 32, 27, 23 and 22 turns respectively.

Group VI (age range 5.1 - 5.6)

Child 1 Ind. (A) Child 2 As. (C) Child 3 As. (E) Child 4 Afro.Car. (C)

4. Look!	4 picks up parts of broken torch.
1. I can mend that	1 comes over to help and takes part from 4
1. That goes on there. I think that can go on there, think that go on there.	1 tries to put them together
4. Oh, that goes on there doesn't it	
4. J.. .	4 picks up working torch
3. I'll come over and show both of you.	3 takes over and tries to mend the torch, 1 and 2 examine colour paddles
1. J.., let's have a look at this. They are different shapes and that colour.	
2. That's purple. Brown, no red, yellow.	
1. Yea, that's purple.	
2. This one's red	
1. Yea I know it's purple.	
2. Green, yellow	
3. Go on then, tip the things out.	3 empties parts out of torch. 2 is talking about colours of battery casing.
2. White, pink, yellow.	
3. I chose something blue.	
1. J..	

In this chapter evidence has been given that young children of a wide range of language competence and from the different ethnic backgrounds can and do talk within a group setting, do attempt to communicate with each other, and share turns in ways which are impressive. The active participation which these methods stimulated is also evident even from the abstracts. The experience was both enjoyable and educationally valuable for these children who shared new experiences with each other and in so doing extended their language. Even the children with limited language competence were able not only to learn but also to contribute something to the experience and to demonstrate new insights with the aid of the materials and the support and encouragement of their companions. Clearly there is also great potential in such settings for the most able children who, from the evidence of this study displayed an ability to use highly complex language as the occasion required it and the situation stimulated it.

The role of the adult in these activities has not been explored in this chapter within which the aim has been to demonstrate the potential in all of these children provided the situation is sufficiently 'structured', supportive and yet free to explore and risk take. The adult clearly had an important supportive role and innovatory role in devising materials which together proved so challenging to the children and which gave even greater potential when the materials were shared. She also proved an important listener in the later sections of the dialogue where the children's language was challenged further as they attempted to share with her in retrospect the experiences they had enjoyed while she had appeared to be too busy to be disturbed. Thus, she became a real audience with whom they attempted to communicate. Where their language was not adequate she could probe with carefully chosen questions, another child might prompt or amplify - and the materials could lend support to the dialogue.

Settings such as that described here could within the classroom clearly have a real value in stimulating language and also other educationally valuable experiences. The time which the adults spend with the children on language activities could also profitably be on occasion a development from such experiences. The scarce resource of teacher-child individual talk could then be available to meet the specific needs of individual children in relation to their current level of language competence.

Note: The research team is grateful to Mrs. Elizabeth Coates for providing the ideas on which these settings were based, for undertaking the practical aspects, and not least for her meticulous transcription and analysis of the ensuing dialogue. We look forward to the further rich insights which are available from these transcripts including the study of writing. The presentations and conclusions in this chapter are the work of Professor Clark. Mrs. Coates cannot be held responsible for any interpretations (or any misinterpretations) which are contained in this chapter.

M.M.C.

CHAPTER 13

SETTINGS AS CONTEXTS FOR DIALOGUE

The discussions in the two previous chapters, of teacher-child dialogue and of dialogue between children in groups of four, was based on recordings of language in settings 'contrived' within the research. In contrast, the discussion in this chapter will be based on an analysis of recordings of children's language over time in a number of naturally occurring settings in preschool units, in reception classrooms, an ethnic support classroom and in playgrounds. Within such settings the language of selected children was recorded as was that of the children and adults with whom they were interacting. The presence of a research worker, or in some instances of a graduate student, as an unobtrusive observer ensured that context notes were made for use with the transcripts; this also made possible the identifications of the peers with whom the children talked, for whom samples of language also became available. Since a number of these children were also in the research group this provided valuable additional information. Children were selected for recording within the preschool units who were likely to enter a reception class in one of the five research schools during 1982-83, who were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and who were thought by the staff to represent a range of language competence. Samples of language of 25 children were recorded at this stage, in three nursery schools and two nursery classes. Most of this material was collected in the Summer Term of 1982 before the commencement of the funded research. Further recordings were made in the Autumn Term of 1982 in the remaining nursery school of children due to enter a reception class in January 1983. Some additional children were added for the recordings made later, children who had entered reception class direct from home. The number of children recorded in different settings varied as a result of some children entering a school other than a research school, entering a class not under observation, absence and children who left. There are a number of children for whom samples of language are available both over time and in a variety of settings. The resulting tape recordings and annotated transcripts contain a wealth of material of relevance to early education and the understanding of child language. Only certain aspects can be considered in this report but fuller details will become available elsewhere. A report based on the preschool recordings is in preparation by Mrs G. Payne, who was headteacher of one of the nursery schools at the time of the recordings, and who has become aware when analysing the material of important organisational and staff training implications for units such as hers. Likewise, the evidence from children studied in different contexts has important teacher training implications upon which Miss W. Dewhirst will report elsewhere. Valuable materials for use for in-service training are also being prepared using extracts from the transcripts.

Method of recording

The method of recording adopted was that developed by Mrs. B. Robson for use in the previous DES funded research and is described in detail in that report (Clark, Robson and Browning 1982). Assistance was given by Mrs. Robson in the initial stages of this study in organising the recording sessions in the present research and with the analysis of the transcripts. A brief description only will be given here of the essential elements of the procedure, for further information the reader is referred to the publication referred to above.

Modern lightweight and highly sensitive radiomicrophones and transmitters were fitted into little butcher's aprons worn by the target children. Similar aprons were placed upon a selection of other children also. The receivers and recorders were set-up in a room away from the setting in which the recording was made and therefore this did not cause distraction to children or adults. The child could move freely around and would be recorded even if at considerable distance from the receiver. Children and adults with whom the target child was in conversation were also clearly recorded. It was possible simultaneously to record more than one target child's language by use of two radiomicrophone systems set to use different wavelengths. Unlike other methods the use of radiomicrophones gave clear recordings within a limited radius of the child wearing the microphone, even when the child was at a considerable distance from the receiver; background noise (including the voices of other children not in the immediate vicinity) was at a minimum.

The tape recording alone would not be sufficient to allow the transcriber to write a complete and accurate account of what was said and done by the child. The context of each piece of dialogue is crucial in presenting a complete report of communication which involves the child's activities, the number of participants in interactions and non-verbal interactions as well as spoken dialogue. This meant that on any occasion on which a recording was made there was an observer unobtrusively making context notes which would at a later stage be linked with the transcript. The observer noted details of other participants, the setting including materials being used (or whether for example it was role playing or other imaginative play without any materials), also any non-verbal responses of the child such as nodding or shaking the head, or physical actions which might be relevant to understanding the dialogue on the tape. Finally any comment from an adult or child in the distance out of range of the microphone could be noted when it was clear it was directed to the target child. Sessions varied in length depending on the setting and activities but most of these in preschool units varied from 20-45 minutes.

Tapes were normally transcribed by the observer as soon as possible after the recordings were made. It is thus clear that the collection of such samples of language requires not only sensitive equipment but also a sensitive and meticulous observer who is also willing and able to undertake the arduous additional task of transcribing the tapes.

Any formal test situation, even one such as that involving the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (PLAI) which was used in this research, places the child in a situation where he is not an equal participant but must instead respond only to the questions of another. As has been indicated the potential in that setting of some children, and the weaknesses of others, was demonstrated and this has been shown to have some relevance to the child's functioning in other settings. The samples of dialogue from the natural settings collected with the aid of the radiomicrophone made it possible to observe further aspects of the child's language competence, including that displayed in the absence of an adult, where the language was on occasion more complex and more dynamic than might have been anticipated. It was also possible to analyse the extent to which the child under observation was a frequent initiator of dialogue, mainly a responder to initiations of others, or functioned in both capacities, whether with adults and with children as the occasion arose. Analysis of a number of the transcripts was carried out using a coding system for analysis of a child's natural dialogue devised by Dr. Marion Blank which is based on the same theoretical concepts as PLAI. Initiations and responses within dialogue are assessed for their appropriateness and level of complexity. That procedure, also used in the previous research, is described in detail with samples of annotated transcripts in Clark, Robson and Browning 1982 p. 104-126 and p.148. Such an analysis enabled the quality of the discourse skills of the children to be explored in considerable depth. Unfortunately the time-consuming nature of the recordings and transcriptions (also of this analysis) made it necessary to limit the number of such recordings (even with the assistance of a number of Master's level students in the early stages). The detailed analysis of even a few sample scripts has proved valuable in highlighting the complexity of the discourse skills of some children and also the evasive strategies of others in attempting to cover up their severe difficulties in communication. Reference will be made here to findings and implications of these language samples collected with the use of the radiomicrophone showing the ways in which different settings appeared to facilitate discourse between the children themselves and with adults.

Evidence from the recordings

The evidence collected during the current research in preschool units and elsewhere supports that obtained in the earlier study and shows also that the implications noted therein for preschool education can be extended to the later stages of early education. It would appear that given the organisation, settings and opportunities young children can and do engage in animated and educationally valuable dialogue; will in many instances assist their less able companions to communicate and will also encourage such children by the sensitivity they show in grasping the meaning of the message their companions are trying to transmit. A love of the rhythm and sound of words was also apparent in many of the transcripts in a variety of the settings, some of it clearly stimulated by teacher-initiated activities. These settings and the ethos of the general environment strongly influenced the quality of language recorded in the child-child settings. The importance of 'private corners' in which to chat was evident, as was the role of versatile materials. The limited quality and quantity of language elicited by some commercial games claimed to encourage language development was also apparent and contrasted with the language which these children heard and used in other settings of peer-peer interactions.

It seems essential that those involved in teaching young children are not misled into assessing a child's language competence by what he or she says in a single setting, or even in a number of teacher-child dialogues. There were a number of examples even within a single recording of a dramatic reduction in quantity and quality of a child's language when placed in a teacher-child, question-answer type situation. If these are the only settings within the classroom available in early education then the teacher may undervalue the child's current level of functioning and thus potential. There may furthermore be no opportunity for the child's discourse skills to be extended to other contexts and used in the process of new learning. The gulf in language between the children in the study was only apparent to the full when the evidence from a variety of settings was analysed. The power of some of the more able children to support, and indeed to teach their less secure companions if the opportunity is provided was evident even at the preschool stage. It was seen in support of and by the children for whom English was a second language, as well as others. An important role for the teacher would be to provide and extend the use of such settings; to organise their classrooms, and to encourage any support staff in ways that facilitate their most effective contribution. It was clear that the mobility and choice which was a feature in the preschool units, but seldom at the later stages, was used profitably and in exciting ways by many of the children. Where this was true it was also apparent that the teaching style and skilful hidden organisation played a crucial role in this. In all these settings, whether preschool or beyond, a further important role for the teacher, in relation to developing language competence and social skills, would seem to be an alertness to identify the child who is not included initially in groups, whose attempts to be included are continually rebuffed, and who has limited language competence. Such children need special help and guidance at an early stage which may be in the preschool unit, and also in the reception class for children who are young on entry to that class, still immature, or in some instances for those who enter the reception class straight from home. Some of these latter children may have had little opportunity to practice or develop discourse skills with children, or perhaps with a sufficient range of adults on entry to school. Their adjustment to and benefit from the early months in the reception class could be greatly enhanced by such experiences within the curriculum and in the classroom. Some element of choice and mobility, together with settings for private creative play, or play with materials and with the children in small groups (with materials readily available), appeared to be valuable as experiences in themselves.

Furthermore some element of continuity in the pattern of day and range of materials available immediately after transfer to the reception class was observed to result in a relaxed transition for a number of children, even for children with some difficulties in communication. Some children do have opportunities for extended and animated discussion with peers or siblings outside of school and this latter was clearly a support for a number of the children of Asian ethnic origin for whom English was a second language, from the evidence of the parental interviews. This is, however, not available to all children. Observations in the playground showed that such settings are not necessarily, or of themselves, ideal places for dialogue between children, though there are some possible modifications which may help. It was apparent that some such settings were more stimulating of creative play and animated dialogue than others. There was evidence from these transcripts of fascinating imaginative play initiated by some of the children whose language was more advanced (from each ethnic background), within which they were leaders, and which was stimulating and enjoyable for the companions who joined them, or were invited to take part. There was evidence of instances where children with limited language or difficulties in communication were helped, encouraged and included. There were also examples of particular children in this setting being rejected and having a rather miserable existence, children whose language competence was too limited for them either to retaliate appropriately verbally or rephrase their requests in a more flexible and acceptable way.

The evidence from the variety of settings was in broad terms in accord with the predictions which might have been made on the basis of the PLAI, bearing in mind that the focus there was on language comprehension and appropriate responses to questions of different levels of complexity. The children who were creatively imaginative in their language play and leaders in activities they stimulated, were all children who had been assessed as average or above on PLAI in English, with the exception of one child. Though low when assessed in English this child was high in Punjabi - and the discourse in the group she was organising was in Punjabi. Not all of the children who scored high on PLAI, however, were creative and imaginative in their use of language, though it appeared that in some instances this was the effect of the setting and certainly a minimum level of competence on the skills assessed in PLAI seemed a necessary prerequisite. There were settings which clearly did not stimulate even these children, for some it was a preschool setting, for others it was reception class contexts. The dangers of judging a child's ability from a limited range of contexts was very apparent. The recordings gave clear evidence that the low responses on PLAI of some of the children were not test-specific but were also evident in a number of language settings in school at this stage. Confirmation that for some children this was true also of their functioning outside the school setting was obtained in some of the parental interviews reported in the following chapter.

Stress so far has been laid on the peer-peer interactions recorded where, in spite of surface errors which were apparent in the speech of indigenous white children as well as those from ethnic minorities, there was evidence in some settings of a sophistication in dialogue, a sense of humour in use of language and an ability to initiate and respond in a group setting. There were Creole features in the language of some of the children of Afro-Caribbean origin in certain settings, this did not, however, appear to result in difficulties in understanding. There was also evidence of a growth over time in a number of children, particularly some of those who exhibited difficulties when recorded initially, or had limited competence in English at that stage.

At the preschool stage the language recorded was in play settings where the children had choice and were mobile, furthermore in much of the play there were peers involved, there were also a number of examples in these recordings of adult-child interactions. A study of the teacher-child dialogue in these settings showed examples of excessive use of a series of questions without allowing a child time to respond, of multiple question and of forced choice questions as were noted in the teacher-child dialogue from the reception class discussed in Chapter 11. In other contexts within the units, or with other adults, there was evidence of real conversations where the adult played a part, not only as a communicator, but also as a genuinely interested listener who encouraged the more able to extend their language to communicate interesting information, and the less able to risk-take in attempts to share experiences. This level of dialogue was more apparent in child-initiated dialogue with adults who were responsive to the child's approach and desire to communicate. There were a number of examples of interesting dialogue between adults and children over what might have been regarded as housekeeping or routine tasks where, in one example, an adult was partially involved in attending to a child's grazed knee but managed meanwhile to sustain a conversation relating to that with a curious child by-stander. These were settings which clearly stimulated communication and learning and also adults who grasped opportunities as they arose. There was evidence of differences in the ways in which and the extent to which children were at ease and communicative with different adults, and adults with different children. This makes it clear how valuable it was to have opportunities for the children to talk with, explain to and share experiences with more than one adult - and with children.

The importance of organisational skills and planning of the various settings to the maximum benefit of the range of children in the class was very apparent. Likewise the importance of utilizing any available support to the best advantage, and involving the more competent of the young children as teachers as well as learners was evident. In this way it could become possible for the teachers to free themselves to have time to spend in a more relaxed way with those in greatest need of encouragement and support.

In the remaining part of this chapter a selection of examples from transcripts in a number of settings will be quoted illustrative of some of the more positive aspects which were noted during the observations and when analysing the transcripts. Examples of the dialogue abilities of a range of the children in a group situation towards the end of reception class have already been given in Chapter 12. These groups included children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In this chapter, in most instances the extracts will include children who have English as a second language, or who have severe difficulties in communication.

Illustrations from the recordings in a variety of settings

Pre-school Setting

Example 1. This example which will serve to illustrate a number of points is an extract from a 45 minute recording in a nursery class of two girls interacting - one of the girls is of Asian ethnic origin and English is not her mother tongue, the other is of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin. It shows an example of play with language between two four year old girls who were on an outside activity - on a seesaw.

Child 1	I can swing
Child 2	I can swing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 Ready steady go.
Child 1	9, 10, 11, 15, 14, 19 Ready, steady, go
Child 2	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 Ready, steady, go. Now you.
Child 1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17 go Your turn, you go. You've got an arm off

(Repeated 16 times in a sing-song intonation in time with the rocking motion of the seesaw)

Child 2 I've got a cousin called Mi...

Child 1 I've got a cousin called Mickey Mouse

(Peels of laughter)

During the 45 minutes observation the two girls interacted together in a succession of activities, on occasion with peers and on one with the teacher, as follows:

> At the clay table for 25 minutes, at bubble painting with the teacher for ten minutes, on the seesaw as above and running around with peers for a further ten minutes.

During the time at the clay Child 2 discussed a school visit the previous week, and a new arrival from Pakistan (who was included and helped to communicate). She showed extended concentration during talk with friends, she also adopted the role of a teacher correcting pronunciation of an Asian child's name (all in English). Child 1 sang and interacted with her peer and close friend for most of the recording. The importance of friendship groupings, such as that shown above, was apparent over the days spent in the preschool units on recording, as was the stability of many of these. One of the above children who had been outgoing and interactive with her special friend in the preschool setting became apathetic and tended to cry in the reception class. In the following year reunited with this friend in the classroom, and with the friendship encouraged, she seems happier and more settled.

Example 2. This example is also from a preschool unit in a Wendy House room with two other girls and a boy.

Child 1 It's time to do the washing now.

(she pretends to wash doll's clothes alongside peer)

Well! How many! What a lot of clothes I'm going to wash, and there are so many more yet.

Child 2 Haven't you finished the washing yet?

Child 1 We're just going to wash, I'll do it, I'll wash

(Child 1 sorts the washing)

This is dirty and this is clean
It's not warm (feels the water)
It's cold.
I'm going to warm the water first because they're really dirty.

(continued with baby on child 1's lap sitting at table with peer and baby).

Child 1 Oh look your baby's mouth is open!

Child 3 You sit down and have your food

Child 1 Yes I'll sit down and have my food, I'm not going to put this on the baby because it's dirty (dress).

Child 3 Don't you want to eat your food?

Child 1 I've just put it on her and she has taken it off!

(this dialogue was continued and extended involving other children).

This extract has been quoted at some length and it was tempting to quote even more as it is complex, imaginative and has extended role-playing which involves a number of children and which is sustained and extended by Child 1. A particular reason for quoting this is that the child is aged 3 years 11 months at the time - and this is a translation from the original Punjabi which was used by the girl throughout, and by her companions. Even someone listening to the tape who does not speak Punjabi can still identify the fun, the excitement and the seriousness with which the role-playing is sustained. The privacy and the freedom to use her mother tongue were essential for this play to have taken place for this child who at this stage had little English and in other settings was shy, rather withdrawn and answered with only the odd word. She scored very low on PLAI when assessed in English but, as might be anticipated, high when assessed later in Punjabi. She was later supported into communicating in English partly by structured play situations with a language focus and by outside visits to encourage her use of English within the ethnic support setting. The importance of an opportunity to play in this setting was clear for this child as was the need to see her in settings such as this if one were not to underestimate her abilities.

Reception class setting

Opportunities for dialogue and communication depended not just on the abilities of the children but on the extent to which the contexts facilitated or allowed them to explore, interact and choose their activities within social settings. Settings which facilitated this were structured settings such as the Wendy House with dressing up materials, painting and sand.

Challenging opportunities for exploration at the perceptual level were also noted for example involving building. Also important was security and time to develop absorbing play with real outcomes (either in terms of making something, acting something or communicating to a real audience). One child with little English was encouraged to use Punjabi with peers in the Wendy House, for example, and organised an assembly which was presented to the rest of the class. A flexible but structured timetable was necessary for such experiences to occur. Even the children with language difficulties were seen to attempt communication in some of these settings which was appreciated by the peers and reinforcing for the child, thus encouraging further attempts. Two brief extracts will be given of such children's attempts.

Example 3. The children are sticking material to make a reindeer.

Child 1	(approaching the table) What are you making?
Child 2	We're making reindeer

Child 3   Yes, we're making ....
(continues to stick with gusto)

Child 2   Oh that girl is coming in here!
(Adult comes in thro' archway)

Child 3   That's not her, that's Mrs ---

Child 4   She *was* coming in here.

Child 3   I never saw her.

Child 4   (teasing) Oh You!

Imitation of one's peers especially for children such as Child 3 above, striving to interact and communicate, was apparent throughout the recordings as it was in those reported in Clark, Robson and Browning 1982.

Example 4. This child who entered reception class straight from abroad, and who at that stage had limited language competence, gained support from the teacher and from classmates both in the classroom and playground. The child while concentrating on a variety of activities available including drawing and writing, followed by lego play, building models, also managed some interaction in spite of his limited communication skills.

Child 1   (is copying script above something he has drawn)

Child 2   New book, I've got no clean pages,
What's that (points to drawing)

Child 1   Same as mine
Looks like a big man.

Child 2   Ain't got no yellow, have you?

Child 1   You can have a big one
I'll have a little one
You have to have one of those don't you
You're naughty... Same as me!

(Child 1's utterance are interspersed with hums and snatches of song)

This teacher-controlled group continued for 25 minutes. During which time the teacher allowed initiations between the children yet ensured they kept to the task set without inhibiting their talk. This was also encouraged and accepted in a later play session with lego with a friend, where the sustained interest was allowed to continue for some time.

There were other examples of creative play in reception classrooms where there was a focal point such as a Wendy House, with extended role-playing and language interspersed with laughter. In one such instance there were physical actions and absorption for the group of children, while fringe peers were drawn into the play - except for one child who when she attempted to join in was met with

"Who said you can play?"

This child withdrew with no strategy to cope with such rejection. As was noted earlier this child needs help in developing oral language competence and social skills - particularly as there is evidence of limited academic progress also. Others of the children with limited language competence were, more successful - one example of such was a child with a peer turn-taking in language while playing a matching table-top game. Further examples could be given of contexts where language was being sustained and developed in a concrete setting by two or more children in reception classrooms where this was not either the sole purpose or even the main purpose of the task. In a number of these settings the encouragement or permission to converse appeared to prolong concentration rather than distract from the tasks in hand. Much of the dialogue was either directly task-related or relevant to it and was at the same time making the task more stimulating as a shared experience for the children. There were occasions of course in all classrooms where the children were silently working on tasks, there were also reception classrooms where silence or quietness was regarded as essential for work, or where group interaction was regarded as play, as was noted in Chapter 7. In such settings there were only limited opportunities for children to share experiences, communication was likely to be limited, and only with an adult, or to a larger group of children in response to teacher questioning.

Ethnic Minorities Support Classroom

As was noted this support was available only in some schools and on a withdrawal basis. Recordings were made in only one of these settings, where there was a large enough classroom and 10 or 12 children thus making it possible for the observer to remain relatively unobtrusive. The recordings showed that the adults encouraged children to communicate giving children time to respond and applauding attempts to initiate. The curriculum was activity-based within which the children gradually learnt to respond in English. In one recording the child speaking in Punjabi in Example 2 was beginning to take part and to respond in English in a setting where the dialogue concerned the milk and its distribution to the children. Another example which gave children gradually opportunities to take part in a group of six was an action story with puppets. The children were retelling the story with only part of the dialogue carried by the teacher and the rest by the appropriate children. When the children's answers were approximately correct the teacher in repeating extended and corrected unobtrusively, for example at one stage -

Child 1 You have to need spots

Teacher You need spots.
So monkey says...

Child 2 Want spots

Teacher I want some spots.

(then all children sing the next part).

The dialogue continued as the story developed and children and teacher took equal turns with firm cues by the teacher (rather than questions). This was followed by other related activities and story books with pictures of the animals were made for the children to take home to their parents.

The adult-child dialogue recorded in this setting utilized a number of the aspects which were observed earlier in child-child interaction in such a way as to support and encourage these children with limited competence in English, and some who were limited also in their own mother tongue. There was a firm base for the communication, framing responses, allowing time for responses. Activity and non-verbal responses were used to check understanding and to show it. The children's love of the pattern and intonation of language were exploited.

Playgrounds as settings for dialogue

Generally these were not conducive to extended dialogue; as noted earlier, the context of the playground as well as the abilities of the children influenced the quality of the interaction. Able children used their own considerable reserves for communication to devise or make their own settings or for interactiion on an abstract, fantasy, game level. Features of such language were its dynamism and spontaneity, the use of rhythm and song, recognition of the abilities of peers and like-minded friendship groupings.

The findings have paralleled that recorded in the outside areas of the preschool units, that settings which had some swings, seesaws, which had some apparatus and close but unobtrusive adult supervision and intervention yielded more opportunities for dialogue. One playground had sloping ground, apparatus, trees and a variety of little walls and steps up to entry ways; the infant school had a separate play area. There it was possible to photograph in a single playtime dynamic interactions of groups of children engaged in different activities. It must be said, however, that in two other playgrounds with less promising settings it was possible to record some examples of conversations, humming and singing and imaginative play. One young four year old recorded spent an entire 15 minutes walking arm in arm with her friend humming and singing between conversations a refrain which was repeated seven times then the full song emerged as "To ride a donkey we have a king" - the new song being learnt in class.

In this setting some of those with difficulties were able to let off steam, to engage in active non-verbal social interaction with peers where there was challenging apparatus and they were socially acceptable. For a few of those with difficulties playtime seemed a stressful time and dinner time even worse. Children who were quiet and lacked strategies for coping faced with large crowds of other children, no friends and nothing obvious to do, endured what must have appeared to be the longest part of the school day. There do appear some ways in which such children can be helped and supported. One change which has already occurred in one of the schools is to separate the part of the playground in which the infant department play; previously the youngest children had to face the presence of all the older children in the same large area. Friendships can be fostered and facilitated within the classroom in ways that are both educationally valuable for learning in that setting and supportive for the children who left to their own devices lack the coping skills and may be isolated or even tormented by some of their more able outgoing peers.

Some examples have been provided in this chapter to illustrate the growing language competence of these young children and its variation across settings. There is no suggestion here that the basic curriculum of the 3Rs should either be abandoned or neglected, or that the teacher should withdraw from active participation in dialogue with the children and leave them to interact individually with friends or in groups. From the evidence in the classrooms observed it was clear that the teachers in these reception classes were indeed fully committed to providing the children with planned and systematically presented instruction in the basic skills from a very early stage. It was also clear, however, that they were not all fully aware of the contexts for language development which had been provided in the preschool units or even that such provision was an important goal of such units. It was also clear that opportunities were not always made or taken for dialogue among the children which could have been supportive of those with difficulties and provided a richer learning experience for the more able children of all ethnic backgrounds. The most able of these were not always recognised as such. It is for this reason that the focus has been on this aspect in these last three chapters. There was a tendency for the teachers to assume that extended dialogue or even oral language practice for these young children required the involvement at all stages of an adult, and, as an instructor and initiator. The aim here is not to devalue the role of the adult. It is to indicate ways in which the adult by planning and organisation can stimulate and sustain meaningful extended dialogue between many of the children which will help those for whom English is a second language, those who have difficulties in English as a mother tongue, and, will also stimulate the most able. The teacher has then an opportunity to become involved as and when appropriate, and when time permits, in planned 'concentrated' encounters with those in greatest need of this assistance in a supportive environment.

The focus in the report so far has been on the school, the children and the teachers. In the following chapter the views of the parents of some of these target children will be reported.

CHAPTER 14

CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

The focus in this chapter will be the perceptions of the parents of a sample of children in the research, based on interviews conducted in July 1984 by which time most of the children had been about two years in school. The interviews were arranged by the school: most of those of Asian ethnic origin were in the homes, most of the others were in school. A considered decision had been made not to interview parents earlier in the research. By this stage the research team knew much about certain of the individual children over time and in a variety of settings. It was felt that it would now be possible to approach parents to discuss their families, their views on education and their children's progress with an interviewer who could be seen to have a concern for and knowledge of these children, as well as young children in general.

It was clear that although it would be important to have some structure and similarity in the interviews across ethnic background there were a number of issues which were more pertinent to one ethnic background than another. It was also evident that great sensitivity would require to be exercised in deciding how far to explore family background, when to abandon certain forms of questioning and at what stage in the interview sufficient credibility and trust had been established, and the parents had relaxed sufficiently, for more delicate but important issues to be raised. The topics to be covered were decided in advance, and also the questions to be asked where this was possible. The order in which these topics were to be introduced was left, however, to the person conducting the interview. A request was made to the parent for permission to tape the interview to avoid extensive note-taking, to this the parents agreed. The interviews of the children whose mother tongue is Punjabi were conducted by Mrs. Whittaker, who had at an earlier stage assessed the children in Punjabi. Mrs. Whittaker's mother tongue is Punjabi and most of these interviews were undertaken wholly or mainly in Punjabi. These interviews together with the assessments will be reported in more detail elsewhere. A translation of the transcripts was provided by Mrs. Whittaker for the purposes of this research. The remaining two interviews of parents of children of Asian ethnic origin were undertaken in English by Professor Clark, of the father of one child and the mother of the other: one spoke Gujerati, the other Bengali, both were sufficiently fluent in English for the interview to be conducted in that language. The remaining interviews, of children of Afro-Carbibbean origin, were conducted by Professor Clark and Miss Dewhirst. The former paid a brief visit to Jamaica immediately prior to the research, stayed in Jamaican homes and visited schools; both have close friends who are Afro-Caribbean in ethnic origin. We are also privileged that during the research we have had Miss Meta Bogle of the University of the West Indies as a consultant who has personal knowledge of Creole and is an educationist with a background in linguistics. All these facts gave us both insights and a credibility in these interviews which it would have been difficult to establish earlier in the research. We would not have been happy delegating the interviews to anyone, no matter how experienced, who had not been involved in the research. This, however, placed constraints not only on the timescale but also on the number of interviews which could be conducted. Mrs. Whittaker obtained short study leave towards the end of the session during which she conducted the interviews. Professor Clark who has had a full-time other appointment throughout the research, and Miss Dewhirst who had returned in 1983-84 full-time to her lecturing appointment, had only limited time available and towards the end of the session. If we were to avoid delaying the production of the final report on the research it was necessary to limit the number of parental interviews. Careful choice was made of the parents to be approached within a number of criteria. We are grateful to the schools for contacting the parents and enlisting their co-operation. It was clear during the interviews that the parents had a warm regard for the schools and felt welcome there. Had this not been so we would not have found it easy to have obtained the co-operation of all those parents we approached. It was only shortage of time, not lack of co-operation which prevented further interviews.

A number of criteria were established in determining which parents to interview. Only children who had been assessed initially on the language test were considered, and within that priority was given to children of different levels of language competence in English for whom there were samples of language available in a variety of contexts. In view of the focus of this research it was decided to attempt to include as many as possible of the parents of children from ethnic minority backgrounds: thus, reluctantly it was decided to exclude children who were indigenous white in ethnic origin. Two exceptions were made. In the first instance in a school where a parent of an able child of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin was being interviewed it was decided to include on the same day a parent of each of two other able children who were indigenous white in ethnic origin and for whom extensive language samples were also available. The second exception was in another school where there were three children in the research, one from each ethnic background, each of whom had a like-sex sibling who entered the nursery class only one year later. Those younger siblings were also assessed on the language test and found to be very similar in level to the older sibling who had been about the same age when tested. Because of the particular interest in these three families each had been visited and interviewed by the nursery class teacher earlier in the session. Only the Punjabi-speaking home was visited again at this later stage and the parents interviewed, this time by a Punjabi speaker.

The interviews have provided many valuable insights into the background of these children. As was found by the senior author in the interviews she conducted with the parents of the young children who were reading fluently on entry to school (reported in Young Fluent Readers, Clark 1976), these present interviews also were an interesting, stimulating and enjoyable experience for the interviewers. In this chapter a number of key issues will be noted. It would be difficult within such a small sample and such individualistic features in the home background to avoid identifying individual families were case studies to be reported: this was not our intention when aproaching the parents. It would be equally unfortunate were the views of a small number of parents to be over-generalised, or 'masking' features introduced to avoid identification, which could be equally misleading as the effect of a particular aspect may well be critical because of its interplay with other features. For these reasons only some of the wealth of information will be quoted here. The full details of the interviews, together with the language samples in a variety of settings, do provide a valuable resource which it is hoped to utilize further at some later stage. A number of these families are interested to co-operate in study of the further progress of their children: several families have a number of children in these same schools and/or other children still to enter them.

The total number of families interviewed was 23, which included 11 children of Asian ethnic origin, 9 of Afro-Carribbean ethnic origin and the three indigenous white children referred to above. Twenty of these children were among the 44 in the group dialogue setting reported in chapter 12, three further children of Asian origin were included because of their particular interest although it had not been possible to include them in that dialogue. Two children had gone to a different school since the dialogue was recorded; all but one of the remaining children from ethnic minority backgrounds who were in the six groups quoted in chapter 12 were included and nine of the eleven children quoted as examples in chapter 11. Thus it is clear that the families in this sample included children of a wide range of language competence on entry to school within each of the two ethnic minority backgrounds.

Families of children of Asian ethnic origin

In all but one of the families of children of Asian ethnic origin both parents were of similar ethnic background and the common language in all but one of these ten families was Punjabi. From enquiries on the language spoken in these ten homes by the adults to each other it was learnt that this was the mother tongue, which was in most instances also that used when the adults addressed the children. When the children spoke to the adults most parents reported that it could be in either English or the mother tongue. In a number of the families when the children were speaking with each other it was reported that they often spoke in English: this was particularly so when there were older children in the family. Some background on the time of arrival in this country is relevant to this information. Considering the families where both parents were of Asian ethnic origin, of the ten families, only one father had been less than 15 years in this country (and in that family the mother had been here longer). Two of the fathers came here as young children and had been educated in this country (but in both cases the mothers were relatively recent arrivals). Two further fathers had attended college in this country at least briefly. The fathers while they had oral language competence in their mother tongue were not all literate in their mother tongue. Two had not attended school, others had a limited amount of schooling in most instances in Punjabi in one instance in Urdu. Several of the fathers were reported not to be literate in English although most were reported to be fluent or adequate in oral language in English. Three of the ten mothers arrived here only about ten or less years ago and all three have a family of several young children. Two of the mothers attended school in this country but only for a few years immediately prior to leaving school. Most attended school at least briefly in India, Pakistan or Kenya where they were taught in their mother tongue. Few of the mothers, even those who had been here for some considerable time had more than what might be considered 'survival' oral English. Most could read or write their mother tongue, and some could read and write some English. Questions were asked about reading in their mother tongue and in English and whether newspapers were taken regularly in either language. An English daily paper was only taken regularly by two families which also took a paper in Punjabi: several other families had newspapers in their mother tongue. Other printed material in their mother tongue was available in most of the homes from the supplementary schools which older children attended. Some had children's books, others textbooks or adult print. Other sources of access to books for the children in English were from a local library, by purchase or from school. Where there were older siblings the younger children often had access to their books. Several parents expressed a wish for more children's books from school which it would appear could have been a shared experience between parent and child. Clearly where such books were available they were much appreciated as a source of shared experience.

Development of the children's competence in spoken English was aided by a number of aspects in the home. Where there were older children in the home these older children often talked with and helped the younger children. Television was also a source of enjoyment and spoken English for most of the children; several children watched 'Play School' or other educational programmes and in one family the television screen was also noted as an important source of printed English for reading practice. Experience of speaking in and hearing their mother tongue was seen as important in all the families. It was important for communicating with relatives, in the home and locally, and on trips to the Sub-continent which most families had made or planned in order to visit other relatives. It was also felt to be important in sustaining the culture, traditions and religions. These families borrowed or hired videos of Asian films as an additional way of introducing the children to their language and culture and this was frequently a shared week-end experience. In a number of the homes stories were also reported to be told in the mother tongue in which all the children were reported to be fluent. In only one instance was a point made that the child needed to be encouraged to speak the mother tongue, although fluent in it.

The views of the parents on education were sought and all seemed to feel it had great importance if their children were to obtain employment. In this connection it is worth noting that only two of the ten fathers are currently unemployed and that half of the mothers are also working at least part-time. A number of these parents were reported to have come from villages yet to have settled into a town here and found employment in an industrial setting. The parent interviewed was asked whether he or she had enjoyed school and they appeared to have pleasurable memories of it and to feel that their children must study and become educated and that they will then find employment.

In order to ensure that their children do become proficient in speaking their mother tongue, and, in most cases, also learn to read and write in it, these parents tend to send their children to some form of supplementary school from a relatively early age. They see the importance that their children are fluent in English but most expressed a wish that some tuition in their mother tongue could also be made available at some stage within school hours or immediately after it, so that the children do not require to spend so much additional time on studying it out of school. Some wanted to ensure literacy in the mother tongue and not only spoken language competence.

The families interviewed all feel welcome in school and are either appreciative of what the school is doing, or at least accepting of teachers as the authority who know best what should be covered. While parents did feel welcome when attending school to deliver or 'fetch' young children and on invitation to attend say assembly, a number of those interviewed would have appreciated a greater ongoing contact in relation to the child's education. This would have been particularly valuable to those with limited competence in English, who could have profited from explanation of the different aspects of the curriculum in early education, and an opportunity in an informal atmosphere to ask questions. Perhaps also an opportunity to observe and participate in some activities say in the nursery class and reception class could have been valuable on occasion. For discussions to have been effective would have required both an informal atmosphere, and someone available to tranalate for the parent, whose competence in English might be adequate for shopping and a limited conversation but not for discussion on schooling and guidance on how best to help their children. Indeed some of the more able children as their ability and confidence in English developed served as translators and interpreters of school in the broadest sense for their parents. For the less able, those with more limited command of English, those with no older brothers and sisters to assist, it seems particularly important that such informal bridges are both established and sustained if these young children are to continue to make progress in our complex educational system. It is worth noting that although most of these children were thought to have settled relatively quickly in reception class or nursery class some were reported to have cried initially as would be true in any group of children. It would appear that some would have little access to English in the home prior to entry to school unless there were older siblings already fluent in the language. It would thus have served several purposes to have encouraged the mothers to stay with the children initially. It would allow the child to settle more readily, to continue to converse in the mother tongue, particularly where there may in some schools be no other adult and few other children who speak this. It would also help the parents to understand the purposes of the different activities and subjects which may both be very different in content and approach from those they themselves experienced and which they perceive as 'good' education. Their experiences of education were often brief, in another culture, another language and some years ago. It seems particularly important that where a first child in a family is entering the school system the parents are welcomed and encouraged to stay, observe and to participate. In this connection it is worth noting that two of the children who could not be tested in English initially were eldest of a young family (both were when tested later in their mother tongue found to be fluent in that). The third child who scored low initially, and later in Punjabi also, and whose parent was included in the interviews had not attended nursery class. By the time of the repeat testing a year later in English this child was competent in English. It is important, however, to consider how much this child and other children from a similar background may have missed by not attending nursery school or class when his or her fellow classmates had, and, by entering the reception class with neither a knowledge of the school- setting, nor at that stage, competence in the language of instruction. It should be noted that this child was in a school where most children had already experience of the school, had attended nursery class - and that many children spoke the same mother tongue as this child: furthermore there was the additional resource of multicultural support teachers to give tutorial support in the early stages.

It has been noted that for nine of these families Punjabi was the mother tongue: earlier in the report it was indicated that these children were in a setting where they had many companions of the same age who spoke their mother tongue. A final point in this section is worth making and that is in connection with the two remaining children of Asian ethnic origin who were in a school with few such children. One of these children at present speaks only English but is expected to pick up the other language very quickly when playing with close relatives who speak no English. The other child who is probably from the only family in the school speaking their mother tongue, attended nursery school: one of the reasons stressed by the parent for that was to ensure that the child would have sufficient competence in English from mixing with English-speaking children to lay a basis for success in school: the child uses the mother tongue at home with the parents.

In these families there was currently at least one sibling in the same school, several also had siblings currently in secondary education also. In only two of those families was there not at least one older sibling in the school, in both of these a younger child had, however, already started school. Furthermore in almost every family there was, as might be anticipated from the above, a sibling no more than a few years different in age from the child in this study, close enough to be a possible playmate. Thus when these children were starting school their family was already known to the staff, the parents knew and were welcomed by the staff. Most parents also had some current or recent experience about that school, its curriculum, materials, expectations which could help prepare and reassure the child and which could compensate to some extent for lack of personal experience of education in this country. In addition for the children themselves the presence of older siblings who were in the school gave someone they could consult, from whom they could obtain help or reassurance, from whom they would learn what to expect and even the names of the teachers. Not least they would have, not only within the home, but also in school, playmates with the same mother tongue with whom they could converse, and if isolated they could possibly play in the initial stages.

The interviews on which the above information was based were of both parents at home in three instances, of the mother only in six, and of the father only in two instances.

Families of children of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin

A parent or other relative of nine of the children of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin was interviewed, eight mothers and one grandmother who after bringing up her own large family was now bringing up several grandchildren. Six of the interviews were in school, the others in the home. Six girls and three boys were included: within each sex there was at least one child who had scored high and one who had scored low on the language test on entry to school. Samples of these children's language in a variety of other settings were also available; this enabled the interviewers to talk to the parent with some considerable knowledge of the child.

All but one of these children was born in this country, that child had stayed with grandparents in Jamaica while the parents settled in this country, arriving shortly before entry to reception class. Eight of those interviewed were born in Jamaica (the mother of the other was born here): they also had at least their early education in that country. Most of those interviewed had at least a year or two of secondary education in this country, and three had attended or were attending a college. Grandparents or another close relative had brought up a number of those interviewed for at least part of their childhood: most had relatives still in Jamaica and several had already returned on a visit. Most of the children were reported to visit close relatives such as a grandmother or aunt, perhaps also to play with cousins living relatively locally.

The size of family groups in which these children lived contrasted with that of the children of Asian ethnic origin described earlier. Three of these were the only child in the home, three others had no older sibling but a younger sibling or cousin in the home, the remaining three had older siblings but the next nearest in age was 13, 16 and 18 respectively, and in the last instance these were in Jamaica. Thus entry to school of the child in this study was in most instances the parents' first contact with that school, and even with primary schools in this country, of which most had not had personal experience. These parents would have no knowledge of the staff in that school and little direct knowledge with which to inform the child of what to anticipate in that school which would be very different from their own experiences in Jamaica. Furthermore, the child had no information or support from a sibling already in the school or who had recently attended, nor any potential playmate from within the home in the early days in school if isolated initially. All were attending schools where children of their ethnic background were in a minority and in some instances a very small minority. While they may not have had language problems (such as those experienced initially by the children of Asian ethnic origin), they did have an isolation of a kind that is not so much ethnic specific as one comparable to the initial experience of school of an only·child, or a child from a small family, with added to that one where the parent or parents were educated in another country. Whether or not the child's colour was a problem, or seen as that by the child initially, there were other features to be coped with by these children in making an adjustment to school. Most of the children did attend nursery school or class (several had attended a day nursery) and by the time these children entered the reception class most had already made some friends and the transition was made quickly and easily. One mother reported that she had expected the child to be upset, but it was she herself instead, not the child! One child who had moved from another area into the reception class appeared at first to have settled but has become more unsettled over time: this child was reported to have been happy and settled in a day nursery. Some of this child's problems, which seemed to be exacerbated if not caused by language difficulties, have been discussed elsewhere. Another child, the only young child in the home, although there were older siblings, was reported to have been very unsettled initially on entry to nursery and to have found it strange to be with other than the mother and father, and to be with white adults. This child who was rather shy and diffident was reported to have made impressive progress during the reception class and furthermore now had a number of close friends from school including two of those who were very able on initial language assessment.

Most of the children were reported to have friends in school those named were from a number of different ethnic backgrounds. The children talked at home about what happened in school, several played schools, often with dolls as the children! Most of the mothers reported reading with the children or telling stories, in two instances an older sister also did so. Several children were reported to enjoy reading either with the mother or to the mother of books from the school library or which were bought. A close bond clearly existed between those who were interviewed and the child. Incidents were quoted and the child's out of school experiences were graphically described by several of those who were interviewed. The interviews and discussions with the relative of the three children who were among the most advanced in the sample when assessed initially on the language test were particularly fascinating in the incidents quoted. The first of these children was reported to love asking questions, was said to chat too much and when a reply was not forthcoming on one occasion to have commented:

"Mom, I'm talking to a stone wall".

The child loved to talk about school, to be heard reading and spelling, even looked with interest back over folders from early days at school noting how much progress had now been made. This child was active, enjoyed playing outside, also enjoyed watching television selectively. Clearly also mutually enjoyed, from the evidence of the interview, was conversation with adults. Among the samples of this child's language is a dialogue in the nursery school with other children who were involved in conversation and role play which this child directed.

The second of these three able children was also reported to have asked lots of questions - and to have been like that since a baby. The child who had attended a day nursery had even sought in the bus to attract attention and engage adults in conversation. Comments on work and progress at school were often discussed at home. The child's comment on one occasion was reported to have been:

> I've had a hard day and I haven't had time to play!

This child already likes to read before going to bed and has attempted to read since an early age though not actually reading on entry to school. The child was read to since small and a younger sibling is also interested in books. The mother describes herself as a 'reading addict'. Like the previous child this child has a selective interest in television, is described as mature beyond the years and with a dry sense of humour - which from the incidents described, the mother shares.

The third child scoring high on the language test on entry, who is the youngest of a large family, settled easily in nursery class, enjoys school, talks about it often and plays schools. The child brings books from the school library frequently, belongs to the local library, also has books bought and attempts to read the paper and do crosswords. Television is also an interest as are stories at bed-time. It was reported that books brought from the library are not laid down until they are finished.

The mothers of two of the other children, both only children, one more outgoing, the other shy, were concerned for their child's education and interested in their progress. Like the others they felt welcome in the school and would visit when it was necessary. One found it difficult because she was working, otherwise she would have attended more often. The remaining four children whose mothers were interviewed had some difficulty with the more complex levels of questions on the language assessment on entry to school. Among these four were two of the children already referred to, one of whom is still having difficulties relating to other children and academically. The mother tries to help but finds it difficult. The second child, who came from Jamaica shortly before entry to reception class, had not attended nursery class and took some time to settle in school. Like the other mother this child's mother needed some help and support. The third of these children was very late in learning to speak which had caused great concern, and thus had not been speaking for long at the time of the testing. The child was now reported to be making progress, reading and beginning to enjoy school. The mother was working and unable to visit school much, but the father who was close to the child went instead. The last of these children was the one referred to who had difficulty in settling in nursery class. This child, the only young child in the home, was particularly close to the father. The parents were delighted with the progress which had now been made in school. Appreciation was expressed particularly for the interest taken in the child and the help given in the reception class. The mother hears the child read and also says the child reads a lot alone. The child who is reported to watch television and to have learnt a great deal from 'Play School' also particularly enjoys drawing. The older sister is close and used to tell stories to the child. This mother is working, as is the father now, and therefore finds it difficult to keep close contact with the school and to know exactly how the child is progressing.

It may be seen from the above that the parents were very positive in their attitude to the school, felt welcome there and that they would discuss problems with the teachers. Several of the mothers were working and therefore found it diffficult to get to school during the day. They had, however, arranged to be free for this interview, and at a time which would suit the interviewer.

A final question was asked of each of these parents and that was their views on Creole or Patois. It should be noted that all these interviews were of women, it might have been that had fathers been interviewed their comments would have been somewhat different. Several mothers made a distinction between the way they would speak to Afro-Caribbean friends and relatives when chatting together and the way they would speak with the child. In the former situation some would, they said use Patois: several did, however, comment that relatives who had brought them up in Jamaica had been strict with them and had told them not to speak, as one put it, 'broken English'. Some Creole features were in the spoken language of some of the mothers during the interview, but these were not comparable in extent to Creole as spoken in Jamaica (nor perhaps by these adults with a group of Jamaicans); that the interviewers would have found difficult to follow which was not true of these interviews. Interesting distinctions were made by several of those interviewed. One mother referring to her own education (in Jamaica):

> It's difficult: what you speak in school and what you write in school is two different things, what you speak is not what you write - it's difficult.

This mother said that she speaks to the child as she spoke in the interview. She also commented that an elder child had English as the best subject in school.

Another mother in response to the question replied "It depends - I suppose not a lot," She went on to comment, however, that her child had said to her:

> "You speak Jamaican in the house and you speak English outside".

She does not feel the child speaks Patois much but went on to comment that "It's part of the heritage" and that the child will pick it up - but knows when to do what and when not!

Another mother commented that she doesn't encourage the child to do that (that is speak Patois). She feels it 'identifies' as Black and won't "help in life talking like that." This family had been in England for some time, and the mother was born here. She said she had been discouraged from speaking like that and didn't have a lot of contact with Patois or Creole. She tries to avoid prejudice in the house and hopes the child would accept mixing of black and white. A final distinction worth noting is that made by one of those who was interviewed and who had been brought up in Jamaica by grandparents. She talked about how she was checked - especially for use of wrong (or different letters e.g. dem, instead of them, etc), by her grandmother who would say "Why do you talk like that, you talk as if you just come off the mountains." She then added "You know, the people that live in the country speak different from those in the town." Her grandmother said it was 'broken English' and she must not talk like that.

During the interviews the mothers used Creole or Patois features to greater or lesser extent, some were distinguishable only by the intonation patterns, others by some grammatical structures which since reading extensively on Creole the interviewers now realise are consistent grammatical structures within Creole. Most made clear that their style of address would vary depending on the context and the person to whom they were speaking, and that they would hope their children's talk would vary likewise as appropriate. From the many samples of language of these children, in different contexts and with different companions, it was clear that some did use distinguishable Creole features in certain settings, others were using intonation patterns as in Creole to carry meaning. This latter aspect which was less apparent to the team was pointed out by our consultant. She indicated that there was a risk that we in studying a transcript, or listeners not familiar with the important functions of intonation in carrying meaning in Creole, might underestimate the child's command of language. She was able to show us some examples of this on the tapes.

It may be seen from the information in this section that the parents interviewed were very positive in their attitude to the school, felt welcome there. Some were unable to visit often as they were working. They did, however, take time off, and to suit the interviewers, to discuss their children. During the interviews they showed a warm affection for their children, a knowledge of their development and a concern that they be successful and happy.

Families of three indigenous white children

It was noted earlier that a parent of three of the indigenous white children who had scored high on the language test was interviewed: all three were children for whom samples of language in other settings were available. One of the children who is rather quiet had according to the mother settled quickly in nursery and she felt this had helped a great deal. All three children were doing well in school and the parents interviewed were interested in their progress. The children read at home, and were all members of a library. One of the children was from a family of three young children with roots in the country to which they made frequent trips which were felt to be of great value to them. Two of the parents in particular were interested in seeing first hand what was happening in school: one of these parents took particular note of this on visits to the school. The other parent had two young children in the school, one currently in nursery, the other had been there previously. Her comments on what she had learnt from observing in the nursery are pertinent to some of the points which were made earlier about potential benefits of such observation to parents from ethnic minority backgrounds without knowledge of the aims of the contexts provided in contemporary early education. Clearly from some of these comments there is much to be gained by parents having an opportunity over time to observe, and to participate. This section will be closed with some extracts from this mother's comments:

> I feel the nursery prepared - - - for school - - - became more relaxed through meeting people. It is good socially. I did not expect the nursery to do some things like cooking nor academic work. I expected more play and singing. . . . There was a good continuation into school. Children aren't thrown in at the deep end. Some of the things the children do in the nursery they do again in school but I suppose there has to be repetition. . . . I didn't expect the children to do anything towards reading in the nursery but they did. Perhaps I thought they would learn the alphabet. . . .

> I have always read to the children since they were babies. We buy books and go to the library. I buy them educational toys. I think about how useful the toy will be. . . We often write sentences or little stories together. . . I think a lot of things - - - did at the nursery helped to read but I didn't understand it all at the time. . . . I enjoy helping and think parents should know what their children are doing and why they do it.

General Comments

Clearly as would be true in any sample of children there were problems being faced by some of these children and/or by their families which have not been mentioned here. Some of these problems would no doubt have caused additional difficulties in adjusting to school and in making progress in school. Some of these which were mentioned by parents it was not felt appropriate to note specifically in this chapter. Care has been taken in what has been reported to avoid divulging anything which it was felt could cause offence or embarrassment to any of these parents or their families. They were of course no more immune to any of the stresses in modern life with a young family and in a time of high unemployment than families who are not from ethnic minorities. In order to give the flavour of the information on the individual children in this chapter it was essential to refer to individual children in relation to certain aspects of their family setting. At the cost on occasion of somewhat contorting sentences the sex of an individual child being discussed has not been indicated.

As was indicated earlier some of the children discussed here were advanced in language initially, some in the test situation were less so: some on each level were boys and some were girls. It has been stressed throughout this report that there were able children, and children with difficulties within each ethnic background. It would not be productive nor even possible to assess the extent of these in relation to ethnic background. The more the other aspects of the child's background were explored the more apparent the complexities became of assessing the interaction between factors in school and at home and the child's own individual characteristics in determining development and rate of progress.

The remit of this study was to look at communication in early education with particular reference to children from ethnic minority backgrounds. For this reason most of this chapter has been devoted to the backgrounds of a selection of the children of Asian and Afro-Caribbean ethnic background. It was noted early in the report that the schools selected were what would be termed 'social priority schools', which were selected because of varying proportions of children of different ethnic backgrounds. A point has been made of stressing the advanced language development of some of the children from ethnic minority backgrounds, in some instances in more than one language. It should be remembered that there may be children with severe and continuing difficulties who are now in these schools or have been in them at some point during the research but who have not been considered. Among these may be children who entered the school late in the school year or were frequently absent (those of the sample not assessed on the language test); others who have joined these classes more recently; others who have by now left these schools and perhaps already attended several other schools. Nonetheless the majority of the children have been studied in depth and over time; their language has been analysed in a variety of contexts and the views of the teachers and the parents have been explored. It is hoped that the form of presentation of the report is such that it will interest the staff in these schools and a wider readership also. It is hoped also that the detail which has been given has been such as to allow those in other schools to draw conclusions and implications of relevance to their practice. Not all children attend nursery schools or classes before entry to reception class as did most of the children in this study. Not all children are in homes where the parents would display the caring attitude and interest in their children shown by the parents interviewed in this study. Not all schools have as dedicated professionals as those in the schools in this study who would be the first to admit they can learn from others, which is indeed one measure of a good professional. It is hoped that they and others will gain insights from this study which will improve the early education of children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

How will the story continue for these and other such children? The future, at least the immediate future in education, looks hopeful with the mutual trust which exists between these schools and the families they serve. It is hoped to study the further development of a selection of these children and to explore some of the features which appear to be crucial to continued success.

CHAPTER 15

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This report is based on a study in depth of early education in five primary schools in the West Midlands with varied proportions of children from different ethnic backgrounds. The research was planned to investigate the similarities and differences in the school and classroom environments within which children spent their first year in the primary school, and the relationship of these to variations in the characteristics of the children themselves. The aims of the research were:-

1) to assess the range of competence of the children and the extent to which this varied in different contexts and over time;
2) to identify features in the school generally and in the classroom organisation and practice which appeared to facilitate and to develop communication with and between these young children.

The research necessitated a detailed and observational study of a limited number of schools and children over time, schools with differing proportions of children from different ethnic backgrounds. The study was planned and has been reported in such a way that it should be possible to identify evidence and issues which have relevance to administrators and practitioners concerned with early education, whether or not they have at this moment in time any or many children from ethnic minority backgrounds. It became clear during the research, and is reflected in the presentation of the report, that few of the issues are 'ethnic' specific. The factors are highly complex and interactive; it would thus do a disservice to educational advance to suggest otherwise. Summary statements and simple guidelines are not what is required if we are to improve early education in a multi-ethnic society but rather a greater awareness of the complexities of the issues, possible alternative solutions and of the differential needs and abilities of young children. The solutions are not simple nor is there an ideal decision which could be applied across situations, with all children, or by all teachers. What is important is that we increase the sensitivity of all those concerned in education whether they be administrators, practitioners or advisers to the pervasive influence of organisational decisions on classroom practice, and also the potential within similar organisational structures for different approaches depending on the professional competence and outlook of the teachers responsible for the education of young children. It is to this end that the present research was planned and within that context it would be impossible to summarize the findings in the way customary with traditional research projects. Instead an outline will be provided which should highlight for the reader what were felt to be the important issues in the preceding chapters. It is hoped that the report will be treated as a whole and that it can be in a very positive sense a challenge to current thinking and a stimulus to future developments in early education, with the empirical evidence from these schools setting a context for discussion in pre-service and in-service education. This report is addressed primarily to practitioners in education and to trainers of teachers. Sufficient evidence of the overall plan and the methods used has been provided in this report to enable others to collect empirical evidence in their own settings, whether they be research workers in the specialist sense, or practitioners wishing to compare and contrast their views and practice with that of colleagues as a basis for productive dialogue, leading where appropriate to new approaches or modifications in practice for some or all children. Materials are also being developed for in-service work.

Plan of the Study

This research was initially funded by the Department of Education and Science as a one-year project, planned as a study during 1982-83 of children entering reception classes in five primary schools with varied proportions of children from different ethnic minority backgrounds. The study, which was a development from a preschool research conducted by the project director, had as its focus the development of abilities in communication of these children as shown over time and in different settings (see Chapter 1 for the background and aims of the study). The extension into 1983-84 with limited additional funding made possible interviews of the teachers who had been responsible for these children's first year in school who could in retrospect consider their aims and priorities for that class (reported in Chapter 7). It was possible also to interview a sample of parents and to discuss with them their views on education, their families and, in retrospect, how well they thought their child had progressed during the first year in school (reported in Chapter 14). The extension also made possible retesting in English after the completion of a year in school of those children whose mother tongue was Punjabi, and who had been assessed on entry to school in English, and later in Punjabi (mentioned in Chapter 10). The extension also facilitated the continuation of the discussions with the schools which commenced during 1982-83 and its further expansion without at this stage fear of contaminating the research. This dialogue included showing drafts of much of the report to the headteachers to enable them to check the factual accuracy of the information on their schools and the clarity of its presentation. It was also possible to initiate a discussion on the similarities and differences across schools and classes on the interpretations of the findings and their implications for practice in these schools and others.

How similar were the children in the five schools in the two education authorities?

To what extent would the school organisation and physical setting influence the classrooms as contexts for learning?

How differently would the teachers of the reception classes develop their curriculum and organise their classrooms and what was the rationale behind their practices?

What was the evidence of the children's language competence on entry to school and to what extent did the assessment of their competence vary depending on the setting?

How similar were the family backgrounds of these children and what were the views of their parents on their children's education and progress after a year in school?

These are the questions behind the information presented in the report, with the focus in Part I on the range of characteristics of the children on entry and on the classroom contexts. In Part II a more detailed report of the language abilities of the children is presented with examples of extracts from transcripts of recordings in a number of settings. In the remainder of this chapter a brief summary will be provided of the main findings and their implications with references to the chapter or chapters in which these are discussed.

The Schools (See Chapter 2)

This study took place in five primary schools in two urban areas in the West Midlands. The two large schools, which are housed in old buildings, have their own nursery class attended part-time by most of the children who enter the reception class. One of the three smaller schools, also in an old building, has its own nursery class attended by a number of the children entering the reception class, most of its other children attend one of the nearby nursery schools prior to entry. The two remaining smaller schools, which are in newer buildings, do not have a nursery class, a number of their entrants attend one or other of their nearby nursery schools.

During 1982-83 the two large schools were organised with one admission date per session, with entry in September for all children who had their fifth birthday during that session: the three smaller schools (in a different local education authority) admitted children on three entry dates, namely at the beginning of the term in which they would have their fifth birthday. In all five schools children thus entered prior to the statutory entry date. Furthermore in both authorities provision of preschool education was for a higher proportion of the population than the average for England as a whole (see pages 11 and 12) and as a consequence, the majority of these children entered reception class from a nursery school or class.

The headteachers of the five schools varied in their time in that post, from one head in the first year in post, to another who had been head throughout the school's development from a streamed junior school serving an indigenous white population to its present position as a large primary school with a nursery class serving a population the majority of whom were from ethnic minority backgrounds, and for the majority of whom English was a second language. The other large school, whose headteacher had also been in post over the period of change, had likewise a large proportion of children from ethnic minority backgrounds, for the majority of whom also English was a second language. In both of these schools teachers from the Ethnic Minorities Support Service were based to assist with these latter children. All three of the remaining schools had some children from ethnic minority backgrounds. In each of these schools there were a few children of Asian ethnic origin and in one a comparatively small number of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin: in the two others there was a greater proportion of Afro-Caribbean origin. In terms of absolute numbers there were nearly as many of this latter group in the two large schools. There, however, they were in a small minority.

In both areas represented in this study there are many children from ethnic minority backgrounds, and for whom English is a second language. Indeed in one of these authorities, for which recent birth statistics are available, it would appear that not only is the proportion of children from ethnic minority backgrounds entering reception class likely to be rising, but also the proportion for whom English is a second language (see pages 7-10). There are likely thus to be a number of schools in the City whose reception classes will have proportions of children whose mother tongue is other than English similar to, or larger than, those represented in the two large schools in this study. There will, however, remain some schools where such children will be present in only very small numbers (as in the three Birmingham schools in this study). At a given point in time a certain school may have few or no children from ethnic minority backgrounds, then the situation may change over a relatively short time span. Likewise even in schools with a number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds the particular background represented may change, also over a relatively short time span. For this reason, if for no other, and there are indeed many good reasons, it is important that all teachers are sensitive to wide and important individual differences in any group of young children on entry to school, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Clearly some aspects of organisation of schools are influenced by, or even controlled by local authority policy, one such is date of and age on entry to school. It is apparent, however, that there are still organisational decisions available within the school which may result in a more gradual admission over time of these eligible to enter on a given date to ensure that individual children have an opportunity to settle into school individually or in small groups. It is even clear that within authority policy different schools may have some flexibility (as was true in Sandwell where these two schools chose to operate one entry date while others had more than one). Likewise, in the revised procedure in Birmingham which came into effect in 1983-84 children may now be admitted at the beginning of the session in which they will have their fifth birthday, or may remain in preschool education, or at home, and enter later in the year. It is important not to assume that the younger a child is on entering school the better for the child, or to accept unquestioningly the statement that it is better if all children enter school at the beginning of the school year. As in other educational decisions, there are advantages and disadvantages in any policy and the long-term value for any child's educational progress will depend on what he or she gains by earlier admission, and loses by its delay. In any discussion of date and time of entry there are crucial related factors which must be considered, including organisational factors within the school. Briefly, flexible date of entry, whereby only a few children enter on any given day, has great potential value provided the teacher whose class these children enter is also flexible and functions in such a way that the latest arrivals are not disadvantaged by an organisational plan and curriculum which is 'instructional' and 'class-based'. It may have particular value if few of the children have attended a nursery school or class and most are thus entering school for the first time or specifically for those entering school for the first time. Where many children are coming from the school's own nursery class, that policy for them might merely separate friends. Likewise a greater number of entry dates in the year may have great advantages in avoiding the danger that the younger children may become disadvantaged because they have been introduced to the basic skills or other aspects of the curriculum at too early an age without full realisation of their relative immaturity (and as a result have failed to make progress). The equally serious danger is that those who are admitted to school later in the school year may as a result be disadvantaged by having a shortened time in reception class after which they are 'promoted' into classes where the teachers no longer regard them as 'reception' children who are still in their first year in school. An indepth study of these five schools made it possible to highlight the potential strengths and weaknesses of these different patterns and the extent to which they were related to other factors. In the schools with one entry date the children all had a full year in reception class; there were, however, children who entered shortly after their fourth birthday, and others nearly a year older. Some of the youngest children were, one felt, in danger of being advanced towards more formal work at a stage when they were not sufficiently mature and might well fail, whereas had they entered even another of these five schools yet with a similar classroom organisation, they would have experienced this only when they were about nine months older. In contrast, there were children who entered school as 'rising fives' in the summer term who were vulnerable to having only one term as reception class children, partly as a result of organisational features in the school (related also to the size of the school). This is not the place to explore such issues in detail: they are, however, highlighted in the report in ways that could prove of value to productive discussion within schools and in teacher training with illustrations drawn from the very different experiences of individual children even within a single year in these five schools. It should be stressed that there is no suggestion that age is the only determinant of maturity or that there are not other important considerations: the evidence here suggests, however, that age is an important and often overlooked factor.

Another aspect of the local authority policy which may influence school policy and which is certainly of relevance, is the extent of provision of preschool education. Clearly discussion and decisions on date and age on entry should be related not only to within school organisation and the curriculum but also to the availability of preschool education. These schools it was noted were admitting into the reception class children most of whom had already received at least some part-time preschool education. It is not possible within this study to assess the relative effects of this attendance on different children since the minority who had not attended were atypical in a number of ways as was clear from more detailed case studies. It is important to stress, however, that most of these children entered reception class either from another class in the same school or from another school. Thus those planning for their early education had either some first-hand knowledge of the children or a source of information from a nursery school. Furthermore most children had established social networks of friends who accompanied them into school, a situation which may not be true in the reception classes in areas where few children have access to preschool education.

The Children (Chapters 3, 4 and 10)

The children who were studied in this research were those who entered a reception class in these five schools during 1982-83. There were 247 children, about half of whom entered the two large schools (in Sandwell) aged between 4 and 5 years of age, the other half entered the three smaller schools (in Birmingham) aged between 4 years 9 months and 5 years of age. While the range of ages on entry in the two groups of schools differed, by the end of the session in July 1983 a comparable age group entered each school. Details of the numbers of children entering each school on each entry date, of the numbers of children of each ethnic background and of the number who had preschool education are show in Table 3.1 (page 18). In Table 3.2 (page 26) the distribution of the children within each school over the year is shown, and the numbers who left during the session.

It was noted that a number of children entered school other than at the normal entry date, others left during the session and that it is important not to lose sight of the particular problems of such children who because of the nature of the research design it was not possible in this study to follow in depth. In the research sample 77% were known to have attended nursery school or class, for a number attendance had been in the nursery class of their same school. Thus for the majority of the children reception class was not their first experience in school, nor indeed even of that school. A number of these who had not such experience were among the late entries who had recently entered the immediate area of that school, again an important point. The proportion of children who had attended preschool education varied between schools, and in several schools a child might have attended one or other of several local nursery schools.

Of the 247 children in this research

41% were indigenous white in ethnic origin
34% were of Asian ethnic origin
24% were of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin
and the remaining 1% from some other ethnic background.

The proportion of children from a particular ethnic background varied in the different schools: indeed this was one of the bases for selection of the schools.

The language skills of the children were assessed about their time of entry to reception class. The test measured their ability to respond to questions of different levels of difficulty of a kind that might be encountered in school. It was possible to assess on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (PLAI) 215 of the 247 children entering these schools in 1982-83 and most of those omitted were late entries or left before they could be tested. The proportion of children who could respond appropriately to questions of different levels of complexity are shown in Table 4.1 (page 37) and in Table 4.2 (page 40). The results for children who entered school on a single entry date are shown in relation to date of birth, while in Table 4.3 (page 41) they are shown in relation to ethnic background. The qualitative aspects of the children's responses in the test situation are also reported briefly (pages 43-45).

The test used was specifically devised for children about this age at the point of entry to school and it would be expected that by about five years of age children would be able to respond to questions on all four levels of difficulty. The age range of the children when tested varied from 4+ to 5+ years of age (as they were tested about the time of entry to school). There were 14% of the children who responded adequately to questions on all levels of complexity and a further 18% to questions on three of the four levels: a further 30% to questions on two levels (see pages 33-38 for information on the levels of the questions and examples). The remaining children could either respond appropriately, when assessed in English, only to questions on the simplest level (30%) or were not able to respond adequately even to Level 1 questions (7%). Further analyses showed that all but one of the children who did not respond adequately in English to even Level 1 questions were children whose mother tongue was other than English (see page 41). This was however somewhat confounded by the fact that there were among the youngest children in the study a disproportionate number of children of Asian ethnic origin (that is in the two schools with one entry date). As could have been expected, a greater number of the lower scoring children on the test were in the youngest age group (see page 40).

It is important to stress the finding that *in each of these schools* there were some children entering the reception class who had impressive abilities to understand and respond to questions of high levels of complexity and perceptual distance; there were other children in each school who were able only to respond appropriately to simple questions tied closely to perception. Furthermore, even when assessed in English, there were children *within each ethnic group* who were able to respond appropriately to questions of all four levels of complexity and perceptual distance. Likewise there were children of each ethnic background with very limited understanding of anything beyond simple labelling questions. At a later stage it was possible to assess the children whose mother tongue was Punjabi on the PLAI in that language. Most of these children could respond in Punjabi to the test when administered in that language, answering questions at least at Level 2 (see Table 10.1 on page 101). It should be stressed, however, that there were wide individual differences in the children's competence in their mother tongue also. The parental interviews of a sample of those whose mother tongue was Punjabi indicated that Punjabi was normally the language of the home between the adults and often also when addressing the children (see Chapter 14). The results of retesting of these children in English after a year in school are shown in Table 10.2 (page 105). By the time of retesting in English a number of these children were able to cope with questions on all levels of complexity, this included children who had on entry had great difficulty (several of these were among the youngest children). Chapter 10 is devoted to a discussion of the assessment over time, in their mother tongue and in English, of the children for whom Punjabi was their mother tongue. The results indicated clearly that on entry to school a number of these children had as yet limited understanding of more complex types of questions in English (at least as measured in the test situation) and this was supported by other observations. During their first year in school most of these children had support in oral language in a small group setting from the Ethnic Minorities Support Service. Two important issues are raised by these findings. It is questionable how much of the classroom discourse some of these young children could understand in English in their early months in school. From observation it was clear that the small group discussions were an important opportunity for them to develop the appropriate language skills. Their attendance at these sessions raises yet other issues including the extent to which this may increase the children's difficulties in understanding the within classroom instruction because of their absence for part of the time. This will be raised again later. It is important to stress that some of these children did have limited English, and it would appear did need help and benefitted from the oral language stimulation in the small groups during their first year in school. It is equally important to stress that some of the children with limited competence in English were highly competent in Punjabi. A relevant point to be noted also is that there were children even within this small sample who at this early age could be tested in both Punjabi and in English and could perform impressively in both languages. The children whose progress is a matter for continued concern are those whose competence in both English and in their mother tongue appears limited, some of whom have additional factors which may be detrimental to their progress.

In summary, entering each of these five schools were children who were able linguistically (shown both in test situation and in samples of preschool dialogue) a few were already able in two languages. There were other children who had difficulties in understanding and responding to questions of more than a very simple type related closely to perception. This was true not only of children for whom English was a second language. Finally there was a wider difference in age on entry to some schools than in others, such that 'reception class' in two schools meant children aged between 4+ and 5+ at the beginning of the session, while in three schools the term 'reception class' referred to children on entry aged between 4.9 and 5 years of age. Most children in the former group then spent one year in the same class with the same teachers and children; most children in the latter three schools spent less than a year (and some no more than a term) with the same teacher in the reception class. A number of children moved several times before they had been one year in school, leaving on occasion not just their first teacher but also a number of their companions (this was related partly to school size).

__The Classrooms as Contexts for Learning__ (See Chapters 5 & 6)

As has been noted many of these children entered reception class with some experience of preschool education in that school or elsewhere. It has also been noted that age on entry varied. The nature of the organisational group within which the child spent his or her first year in school also varied depending on a variety of factors including the size of school. The children entering one of the three small schools joined a very different group depending on date of entry and it was clear that the experience of early education of the children entering at different points was very different (particularly this was noted for those who entered in the Summer Term). It is important to look carefully at the first year in school of a selection of children within such a system and to assess the extent to which children may be disadvantaged by the organisation in the school and whether there are any ways this can be alleviated - otherwise the accident of date of birth will at a very early stage affect differentially the children's experience of early education and their progress. In some ways the children likely to be most at risk could be those who entered late in the school year, and without preschool education. The issues to be explored with more than one date of entry are related to the above and are organisational within the school as well as within the classroom (see Chapter 5 for further details). Children entering either of the two large schools (age range 4-5 years of age) could have been placed in more than one possible classroom. In one school there were two reception classes, in the other, four classes with reception children (and also second year infants). In both these situations the children could have at least one year with the same teacher and group of children. In these two schools most children for whom English was a second language also attended an EMSS teacher regularly during their first year in school.

Observations in the classrooms revealed that while there were certain basic similarities in the curriculum which would be offered irrespective of the particular school or class which a child entered there would be differences in the approach adopted by the teacher and in the organisation of the classroom (see Chapter 6). In some classrooms there was a more explicitly organised timetable not only for shared facilities outside the classroom but also during the day. The distinction between the teacher as an 'instructor' or 'counsellor' appeared useful in distinguishing the approach; although there were individual differences these teachers were nearer to the former than the latter end of the continuum. There were differences, for example, in the extent to which the teachers either facilitated or encouraged talk by or between children, the extent to which they regarded part of the day as for 'work' (in the basic skills) and creative activities and discussion as 'play'. Observation indicated that in general the classrooms were similar to the reception classroom described in And So To School (Cleave et al, 1982) in reflecting more the first of each of the following concepts work/play, dependence/independence, static/mobile, set work/choice of activities (and in contrast to the nursery schools and classes in that study where the second of each of these concepts was the more favoured). Interviews of the teachers at a later stage confirmed their commitment to the patterns which had earlier been observed in their classrooms.

There is clearly no best approach for all children. One context may be more stimulating for certain children while a very different context may suit others: likewise one organisational pattern or approach may suit one teacher and be almost impossible for another teacher to sustain. There was evidence within this study of some children showing an independence and prolonged concentrated attention or impressive dialogue skills at the preschool stage which did not appear to be stimulated or in evidence in the reception classroom. There were other children who made rapid progress in basic skills and appeared to be stimulated by the 'work' orientated ethos of the reception classroom. Several points which are important in this connection, however, are the lack in some settings of a 'graded' transition or even follow on from the kind of activity and type of approach of the preschool settings or of facilities and opportunities for creative play and oral language development as part of the curriculum. This would be particularly a matter of concern where few children had attended nursery education and here it is so with regard to the children who had entered direct from home where not all had experiences of dialogue and 'concentrated' activity in small groups with other children. The potential of such activities and settings for language development were apparent in the settings reported in Chapter 12. In some of the classrooms there was limited evidence of dialogue which would assist the development of language skills of the children for whom English was a second language or for children with limited competence in English as a first language. The early experiences of the basic skills of such children could have been assisted by dialogue with their more able classmates which would have been educationally productive. From evidence in other settings there were partly unrecognised and untapped language skills among a number of children, including older children in the classes with family grouping.

One noticeable feature was a similarity in the concept of 'reception class' irrespective of the age group of children composing the class with little allowance for the fact that, for example, most of these children were below the statutory age of starting school when they entered the reception class - and some far below. Many of these children could in another school, area, or as a result of change of policy within the same authority have still been in attendance in a nursery school or class (some even by the end of their year in reception class). There seemed to be little allowance for these differences but rather of a curriculum for the reception class. Furthermore, the extreme youth of some of these children, who on entry were little over four years of age (and for whom in addition English was a second language) did not appear to be fully acknowledged in, for example, the emphasis on early writing skills and expectations of motor co-ordination. The above points are in no way peculiar to the classrooms in this study. They are, however, more easily identified and highlighted when, as in this study, it is possible to observe individual children over time and in different contexts.

The contexts which the children experienced when with the EMSS teachers were also observed. There the focus was on oral language and encouraging the children in their limited time in attendance to use and to develop their competence in English within a framework of supportive activities (this is reported in Chapter 5 pages 55-57 and Chapter 6 pages 67-69).

The Teachers: their views (See Chapter 7)

After the observational aspects of the study were completed it seemed important to interview the teachers to ascertain their aims and priorities with regard to these reception classrooms. These were all experienced teachers and only one was new to that school during the time of the observation, another was teaching the reception class for the first time in 1982-83. In general the interviews confirmed the views on the priorities of the teachers which had been inferred from their classroom organisation and practice. The interview initially explored their views more generally then included a number of specific questions on aspects of practice in early education (the interview schedules are in Appendix I).

Most of the teachers gave among their priorities for the reception class some aspect of settling children happily and confidently into school prepared to benefit from the curriculum to the best of their ability. Constraining influences mentioned included physical amenities and human resources. The teachers did not, however, refer to age differences within the reception class either in response to the early question or in response to questions about the range of skills the children brought. Several teachers felt they had been too anxious to advance the children in the basic skills at an early stage. The teachers clearly saw instruction in the '3 R's' as important in the reception class and placed an emphasis on the basic skills in reading and the motor aspects of handwriting. Some children were felt to be ready to read immediately and most ready for handwriting practice. The emphasis in their classrooms was not seen by the teachers as a result of pressure from the teacher who would next receive these children. Oral language development was stated initially as an important priority by several of the teachers and when asked specifically all acknowledged its importance. Each regarded it as her responsibility and reference was rarely made to the possible important roles played by others in this, either from the preschool setting, in the EMSS setting, or at home.

The teachers were in general committed to the type of pattern within which they operated with regard to intake, although some concern was expressed for the problems of three intakes related to the problems of the summer intake and the limited time these children were with them (partly the effect of size of school rather than intake specifically).

The views of the teachers on similarities and differences between preschool education and reception classes in aims and organisation were relatively consistent and in line with those observed in And So To School (Cleave et al, 1982). There was little awareness that language development was an important aim of preschool education which was seen mainly as 'socializing'. There was limited knowledge of the patterns of activities in preschool education and what might have been the experiences in that setting of the children they had received (and likewise of possible lacks in those who had come direct from home). It seems important that there is more shared knowledge and discussion between those directly involved with the children's education before and after the transition and that teacher training of any teachers who will be responsible for children in reception classes does include knowledge of and observation in preschool units.

The teachers were aware of the children with difficulties; there was a tendency to attribute any improvements in the children's language over their first year in school exclusively to their efforts and not to make reference to the work of other agencies or the home or indeed the fact that some children were very young on entry. Problems did not tend to be referred to in terms which were ethnic specifically but rather by a description of particular children in terms of a constellation of factors of which, for example, second language learning might be one, or arrival from abroad or particular known features in the home background. Such children might be from an ethnic minority background or not and it should be noted that this was indeed the background of more than half of the children in this study. The teachers when specifically asked about their views on any problems caused by the children's ethnic background responded that they felt the children were integrated as a community and played well together - a view that was confirmed by observation in the preschool units, classrooms and playgrounds and of friendship patterns.

The co-ordinating role of two of the teachers with posts of responsibility for the infant department was also explored (in the two schools with several reception classes). They were committed to the organisation in their respective schools, were aware of the individual children, their needs and their families and familiar with the nursery setting which the children had attended (for which they were also responsible) and with its aims. They regarded oral language development as an important priority in the reception class and would not have placed pressure on the staff to accelerate teaching of the 3Rs at that early stage in the children's school career.

The EMSS teachers who were interviewed also stressed the importance of oral language, and regarded the development of that as their aim, work specifically in the basic skills they felt was the responsibility of the class teachers. As had been noted when observing the groups of children in these settings, dialogue had a high priority about and within familiar settings to ensure that the children acquired a survival language as quickly as possible. These teachers felt their separate settings enabled the children in these small groups to 'risk take' and develop their competence - especially the shy and quiet children. There are advantages and disadvantages in any pattern of support service whether the children are assisted by team-teaching in the regular classroom, are withdrawn and if so for structured teaching, work related to the class work, or for compensatory or different activities. These staff were clearly providing a dynamic and activity-based oral language environment for these children for whom English was a second language and one within which in a very short time the children had considerable opportunity to speak, to interact and gradually to develop confidence. The extent to which these teachers could have developed a similar setting or the crucial elements of this setting in the regular classrooms is open to question, especially in a context where their priorities and also their organisation and approach might be very different from those of the reception class teacher. As with other educational decisions there are complex issues to be explored. What is important is that the strengths and weaknesses of each approach are fully appreciated and that dialogue between the adults involved in the education of a single child is encouraged and indeed facilitated - whether it be between the preschool teachers and the reception class teachers or the reception class teachers and the support services. It is difficult with the demanding task within one's own setting in early education both of time and resources to initiate and even more to sustain discussions. Clearly, however, such sharing whether it be by working simultaneously with others, by observing them at work, or at least by comparing views and perspectives should be part of the training of teachers and of their continued professional development. The value of this is perhaps highlighted by the evidence of the many-sidedness of these children and their very different 'faces' in different contexts where anyone seeing them in only one setting - or type of setting - could well underestimate their abilities or fail to appreciate their difficulties.

Language: the influence of setting (See Chapters 8-13)

Much of Part II of the report is devoted to a discussion of the evidence from the recordings of the language of a sample of these children, preschool and in a variety of settings after entry to the reception class.

The teachers were shown sample items comparable to those of the questions of different levels of complexity on the language test and asked to judge the likelihood of each child succeeding on each of these items (Chapter 9). Most of the teachers did regard questions of Level 1, 2 and 3 on the test as of increasing difficulty, but did not discriminate between the sample items at Levels 3 and 4 in spite of the need in the latter for verbal (not pointing) responses and to a 'why' question. In general the children their teachers expected to do well were among the better scorers and those expected to have difficulties were among the poorer scorers. There were noticeable differences in the spread some of the teachers would have expected based on the sample items and the actual proportions at different levels on the test. While it is accepted that this is a comparison between sample items and children's performance on a range of items at each level there was some relevant evidence from the recordings made of teacher-child dialogue (reported in Chapter 11) which suggests that the teachers were not all aware of the high level of competence of some of the children in language and the extreme difficulties faced by other children in meeting the demands of relatively simple questions, even in the presence of materials as a focus.

The teachers were asked to speak briefly in turn with a number of children individually, children from different ethnic backgrounds and for whom language samples were available in other settings as well as their results from PLAI on entry to school. In most samples the teacher adopted a role of 'instructor' asking questions where a 'right' answer was in mind and the child's response was thus limited, resulting often in single word answers - or on occasions silences from those with difficulties. The more successful dialogue was when an able child felt free to contribute beyond the bounds or requirements of the question or the teacher 'engineered' a conversation where at points she was indeed a real audience with whom the child was attempting to communicate - and might succeed, in spite of difficulties in coping with all the surface features of language - which might indeed be a second language. There was a tendency for the teachers to ask the children a series of questions, and on occasion multiple questions without allowing the children sufficient time to process the individual questions. There was also a tendency to ask frequent forced choice questions needing only one word answers.

In Chapter 12 evidence is presented from transcripts of 44 of the children who were recorded in groups of four with, in each group, children of different ethnic backgrounds and levels of competence in language. The setting was comparable for all and obviously stimulated a sustained discussion and activities between the children to which all contributed. In this setting even the less able children were permitted to participate and showed an ability to ask questions, to respond and to use sentences in their attempts to communicate. At a later stage in that setting an adult joined the group and developed the discussion further as the children attempted to relate to her the activities in which they had participated. There were Creole features in the language of some of the children of Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin in some contexts. From the tape recordings in these group settings it would however have been virtually impossible to identify the ethnic origin or mother tongue of children with any certainty.

Further evidence is presented in Chapter 13 drawn from other contexts showing the importance of the setting in determining the extent and quality of language used by individual children. As in the earlier chapters there are examples from children from different ethnic backgrounds. The contribution as a stimulus to language of certain types of setting and particular activities was apparent in the recordings as was the skill of some of the more able children (even those for whom English was a second language) in encouraging and supporting less able companions in communication. Some lessons and ideas for classroom activities and guidelines for teacher-child dialogue are presented in these chapters. Further papers based on the dialogue in preschool units, the group discussions reported in Chapter 12 and the language in different settings reported in Chapter 13 will also be reported elsewhere.

Parents: their views on their children (see Chapter 14)

A parental interview was arranged for a sample of the children, examples of whose language in a variety of contexts were available, at least one parent of 23 of the children was interviewed, mainly those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Where the mother tongue was Punjabi the parent was interviewed in that language. Background information on the family was obtained, including in the case of the children whose mother tongue was other than English, the language used in different contexts in the home. Where the parents themselves had been educated and in what language was also noted (the interview schedule is Appendix II).

In all but one of the families of Asian ethnic origin that was the origin of both parents and the mother tongue was normally used in the home between the adults. It was often also used in talking with the children who were more inclined now that they were at school to address each other in English. In most families the father at least had been in this country for more than 15 years. Not all the fathers were reported to be literate in their mother tongue and several, though competent in oral English, were reported not to be literate in English. Three of the mothers, all with relatively young families, were relatively recent arrivals in this country. Most mothers had some limited command of English, but their mother tongue was the language in the home between the adults and tended also to be that used to the children. The families kept links with relatives in this country and in their homeland; a number used videos of Asian films for example as a way of informing the children of their culture which, with their religion and customs, it was felt important to retain. These parents regarded education as important for their children's future even where they themselves had limited education either in their mother tongue or in English. These parents wished to ensure that their children were competent in English and in their mother tongue in which there was often material available in the home. All the children of Asian ethnic origin whose parents were interviewed had brothers or sisters who had already attended that school or were still in school.

The size of family group of the children of Afro-Caribbean origin whose parents were interviewed was very different. The important difference from the point of view of links with the school and knowledge of the expectations and approach within the school was that these children did not have a sibling attending that school who might be a companion in the playground for example, nor had they an older sibling who had attended that school. Thus this child's entry to school was the parent's first or only recent contact with that school and most of the parents interviewed had at least their primary education in Jamaica, not in Britain. The views of these parents on their own and their children's use of Creole (or Patois) are also reported in Chapter 14.

All parents interviewed felt welcome in school and did not appear reticent to discuss problems with the staff. Some would have welcomed more contact but were reticent to initiate it, especially where they had a limited command of English. Some would have appreciated more books from school for their children to read and all seemed, in different ways, to be supportive and encouraging of their children, interested in and knowledgeable on their progress.

It was clear throughout the study that these schools were committed, caring settings for the education of these young children, that they were integrated multi-ethnic settings where the children's friends could be and were often from different backgrounds. Those for whom English was a second language were supported, often with the additional presence of older siblings close enough in age to be playmates as well as communicators of what to expect, both to their younger siblings and to their parents. There were things that could be changed and improved, and were promising developments which could be fostered. The issues were seldom seen or treated as 'ethnic' specific in the schools. There was a concern rather, within the constraints of the system and organisation as it is, in the style most suited to the individual practitioner to cater for the early education of all these young children in such a way as to give them a firm foundation and promising start. It is hoped to explore at some later stage the further progress of a selection of these young children. It is to be hoped that the positive attitudes to school and to education are maintained and their progress continued.

There are some children for whom concern must already be felt - a few are referred to in this report. Others were noted on visits to schools, among those who entered late, changed schools, and/or were absent on a number of occasions, thus frustrating the attempts by the schools to sustain the support which they so clearly needed. The focus in this report on the children whom it was possible to observe over time and in a variety of contexts must not lead us to overlook these other often vulnerable children. It may be possible at some point to identify some of these children from the early class lists and observe their progress also.

There are important insights from this research for those involved in early education - administrators and advisers as well as teachers. There are implications for in-service and initial teacher training, not only for those who will work in multi-ethnic schools but for all those training for early education. In addition to this report there are related papers already in press (See Clark ed. 1985), videotaped examples of assessment of young children and interviews with two of the consultants on communication with young children. Extracts from transcripts will also be available. Together these resources should provide a stimulus to help those involved in early education to meet the new challenges with which they are faced.

APPENDIX I

Interview Schedule for Teachers of Reception Classes

We are interested in the perceptions you had of your reception children last year, how you saw them on entering and then leaving your class; what you felt were the key areas in your curriculum aims; and if this class was any different or similar to classes you had taught before; and if so, how.

AIMS

1. What do you see as the priorities in being a reception teacher?
2. What features helped you achieve your aims? (physical; human; curriculum)
3. What other features constrained your practice?
4. What range of skills did the reception children bring with them on entry?
5. How did you go about building on them?
6. What were your greatest successes? In which ways were you unsuccessful?
7. If you were starting now, in what ways would you have done things differently? (materials; organization; approaches)
8. What were the constraints preventing you from succeeding?
9. Were there any particular features peculiar to last year affecting the teaching/learning context?
10. Was there any child/children who had highly specific individual learning needs/problems?
11. In relationship to your aims as a reception teacher
    (a) What do you see as the strengths/weaknesses of family grouping (School 2)
    (b) If you had had a class of all reception children would it have altered the overall aims in the classroom?
12. In relationship to your aims as a reception teacher
    (a) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of three intakes a year?
    (b) ..... one intake a year?
    (c) ..... one age-range/family grouping?

13. (a) In relationship to your aims as a reception teacher, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of a class of all reception children?
(b) Alternative -?
(c) In relationship to your aims as a reception teacher what do you see as the strenghths and weaknesses of one intake?
(d) ..... three intakes?

14. What had you hoped to achieve with most of the children in the curriculum at the end of their reception year?

15. In what ways do you see a difference between the reception class and a pre-school class?

16. Are there any similarities?

17. Some children enter reception class having had nursery class or school experience, some have not. Do you see them as having different needs? In what ways?

It has been suggested in recent research, that children in nursery schools and classes have free choice of activities for most of the day.

18. For what proportion of the day in the reception class do you consider children should have choice of activities?

19. What sorts of activities?

The same study has suggested children in the nursery setting are free to move around at choice.

20. What is your view about this for the reception child?

21. To what extent did this happen in your reception class?

22. For what purposes?

Research has also shown that nursery children are allowed to develop and sustain areas of interest/activity.

23. To what extent is this appropriate in a reception class?

24. If so, what sorts of activities/areas/interests do children initiate an area of interest?

TEACHER MOBILITY

In preschool, staff tend to move around and make contact and work with individual children for most of the day.

25. How far do you think this is appropriate in the reception class?

PLAY/WORK

It has been observed, through research, that play was used as a label more often than work in the nursery setting, whereas work was used more in reception classes and play is something to do when work has been finished.

26. How do you feel about this?

I expect like most teachers, you see helping children to read as part of the job of the reception class teacher.

27. What kind of resources do you feel are important in helping you achieve this?

28. Are there resources that you feel you need or are in short supply?

29. How do you decide when to start the teaching of reading with individual children?

30. How do you go about it? (groups, individual)

31. What do you see as the early stages of reading?

32. What do you see as the early stages of writing?

33. What do you see as the early stages of number?

34. Do you see a role for writing production as distinct from copy writing? If so, what?

35. What is the role of story reading?
Have you read the research report And so to School?

36. If you had been the teacher receiving the children into the next class, what skills would you have expected them to have in reading?

37. If you had been the teacher receiving the children into the next class, what skills would you have expected them to have in writing?

38. If you had been the teacher receiving the children into the next class, what skills would you have expected them to have in numeracy?

39. Would you have expected this of all the children?

We have talked about children; curriculum; skills.

40. What do you see as the importance of oral language?

41. I expect some of the children have limitation in oral language on entry to reception - which features are particularly striking?

42. How much of it is your responsibility to help overcome these?

43. Were there any children whose language was so limited that it made it difficult for them to function in school? Name.

44. In what ways were they experiencing difficulties?

45. Were there any children you regarded as language advanced and you had difficulties in catering for their needs within the constraints of the classroom?

46. Do you feel that any of the children had particular difficulties in school because of their ethnic background? Who?

47. Language difficulties or problems in other areas - e.g. playground.

48. What kinds of problems?

49. I know we have asked a lot of questions - perhaps we have asked the wrong ones. Are there any other points you want to raise that you think are relevant or important?

Interview Schedule for teachers of reception children from EMSS

1. What do you see as your priorities in terms of EMSS teaching?

2. What features helped you achieve these?

3. What other features constrained your practice?

4. What range of skills did the reception children bring with them on entry?

5. How did you go about building on them?

6. What do you consider were your successes?

7. What do you consider were your failures?

8. Were there any particular features last year affecting the teaching/learning context?

9. Was there any child/children who had highly specific individual learning needs/problem?

10. In what ways do you see a difference between the children entering reception having had nursery experience and those from home?

    It has been suggested in recent research that children in nursery classes have free choice of activities for most of the day:-

11. For what proportion of their time in the EMSS setting do you consider children should have a choice of activities?

    It has been observed, through research, that play was used as a label more often than work in the nursery setting, whereas work was used more in the reception class and play as something to do when work has been finished.

12. How do you feel about this?

13. I expect some of the children have limitations in oral language on entry to reception. Whose language was so limited that it made it difficult for them to function? Name.

14. Were there any children you regarded as language advanced? Name.

15. Any other points?

Interview Schedule for Teachers in charge of Reception Classes

1. What were the bases on which the reception classes were formed, or to which classes the reception children were sent?

2. What range of skills did the reception children bring with them on entry?

3. What do you see as your major aims as a head of department (head of infants)?

4. Were there any features in the department that helped achieve these aims?

5. Any constraints?

6. What do you consider were your successes/failures last year?

7. Is there anything that you would have done differently in your department if you were starting over again?

8. Were there any particular features peculiar to last year affecting the situation?

9. In relationship to your aims as a head of department, what do you see as the strengths/weaknesses of one intake into reception?

10. In relationship to your aims as a head of department, what do you see as the strenghths/weaknesses of three intakes into reception?

11. In relationship to your aims, what do you see as the strengths/weaknesses of family grouping?

12. In relationship to your aims, what do you see as the strengths/weaknesses of all reception one age entry?

13. What would you hope that your staff would have achieved with most of the children at the end of their reception year?

14. In what ways do you see a difference between the reception class and preschool class?

15. Some children enter reception class having had nursery class or school experience, some have not. Do you see them as having different needs?

    It has been suggested in recent research that children in nursery school and classes have free choice of activity for most of the day.

16. For what proportion of the day in the reception class do you consider children should have choice of activity?

The same study, as you probably know, has suggested children in the nursery setting are free to move around at choice.

17. What is your view about this for the reception child?

Research has shown that nursery children are allowed to develop and sustain areas of interest/activity.

18. To what extent is this appropriate in reception classes?

TEACHER MOBILITY

In preschool, staff tend to move around and make contact and work with individual children for most of the day.

19. How far do you think this is appropriate in the reception class?

PLAY/WORK

It has been observed, through research, that play was used as a label more often than work in the nursery setting, whereas work was used more often in reception classes and play is something to do when work has been finished.

20. How do you feel about this?

21. What kind of resources do you feel are important in helping your teachers with the reading process?

22. Are there resources that you feel are in short supply?

23. What do you consider are the early stages of reading?

24. What do you consider are the early stages of writing?

25. What do you consider are the early stages of number?

26. Writing production: Do you see a role for writing production as distinct from copy-writing?

27. What is the role of story-reading?

28. What do you see as the importance of oral language?

29. I expect some of the children have limitations in oral language on entry to reception. Which features are particularly striking?

30. How much of it is your responsibility to help overcome these?

31. Were there any children whose language was so limited that it made it difficult for them to function in school? Name.

32. In what ways?

33. Were there any children you regarded as language advanced and there were difficulties catering for their needs within the constraints of the classroom?

34. Do you feel that any of the children had particular difficulties in school because of their ethnic background? Who?

35. Any other relevant or important points you think we may have missed?

APPENDIX II

Parental Interview

Below are the topics covered, where possible, in the interviews. They were adapted as appropriate. Some of the items were included only where the child's mother tongue was Punjabi and/or replaced by alternative items on background.

Name of child
Person interviewed
Children Position in family, age and sex of siblings. Schools attended by siblings and whether nursery school was attended.
Number of adults
Place of birth mother and father
Arrival in UK (date)
Education (place)
(medium)
Age on leaving school
Present work
Any holidays to sub-continent
Why was this area chosen to live?
How long have you been here?
Do you have many relatives living nearby?
If yes, do you visit each other frequently?
Anyone visiting frequently who speaks only first language?
If no, how often are you able to visit relatives?

Language

Which language do you tend to use at home?
a) adults
b) adults with children
c) children
d) children with adults
Any circumstances when other language used?
Are you literate in first language (e.g. newspaper)?
If yes, is that due to subcontinent schooling or something else, e.g. supplementary classes/home tuition in U.K.?
Are any of the children learning to read, write first language?
At home or classes?
If not yet, will you encourage this when children are older?
Do children have access to books, newspapers in first language?
Either adult or children's material?
Does anyone read/tell stories to children in first language?
If yes, how often, how is it done? With/without books or pictures?

Do you feel children benefit from above?

Do children watch a lot of T.V? (Special programmes)

What sort of things has he/she learned from T.V?

What about films - video? Have you got/hire a video recorder to watch Asian films?

If yes, how often?

If yes, do children watch as a family?

Perhaps this has not been possible yet, but do you think children visiting the subcontinent is important?

Context of School

How do you think ..x..'s education is developing?

How is he/she finding English and Punjabi?

How do you feel about first language in school? Would you like to see it introduced?

How?

Why do you think it has not been introduced?

To Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin parents the questions were on the use of Creole by themselves and the children.

Parental Perceptions of School

How do you feel ..x.. is getting on at school?

What kinds of things do you think he is learning? Are there other things you would have liked him to learn?

Did he settle into school straight away?

Does he talk to you about school? What kinds of things does he talk about?

Does he have special friends at school?

Have you met any of them?

Who does he play with when not at school?

What does he play at? .. when he is alone?

Did you enjoy being at school? Age on leaving?

Did you do any study afterwards?

How important do you think education is for your child?

School/Home Parental participation/initiative

How often do you go to school? Welcome?

Do you ever get a chance to talk to the teacher?

Have you ever had a chance to be in the classroom? Yes/No.

Would you have liked to have had the chance?

Did you find it interesting?

What are the ways you feel you can best help your child to get on in school?

Do you think it is important for your child to read?

Do you have much time to read yourself? If so, what?

Do you take a newspaper regularly?

Child at home/personality

Does he like to play with other children? If there are no other children, what does he do?

Is he like his brothers/sisters?

Does he get upset easily?

Do you have to check his behaviour often/not often/hardly ever?

What kinds of things does he talk about?

What does he particularly enjoy doing?

Does he watch T.V? Special programmes? What sorts of things has he learned from T.V?

When he was small did parents or other adults read or tell stories to him?

How often? never
not very often (less than once per week)
about once a week
a couple of times a week
every day

Does an adult still tell/read stories now?

Does he like to look at books? Any favourites?

Does he bring books back from school? Do you listen to him reading? Does he want you to?

Does he belong to school library?

Do you buy him books? Does he enjoy choosing them?

Does child do any of the following at home-

play with toys)
writing) often
drawing) sometimes
reading) never
looking at books)

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